

The Great Books
of Islamic Civilization

Al-Qushayri's Epistle on Sufism

Abu 'l-Qasim al-Qushayri

*Al-Risala al-qushayriyya
fi 'ilm al-tasawwuf*

Translated by Professor Alexander D. Knysh
Reviewed by Dr Muhammad Eissa



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Epistle

ON

Sufism

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FOREWORD

THE interrelationship and interaction of human cultures and civilizations has made the contributions of each the common heritage of men in all ages and all places. Early Muslim scholars were able to communicate with their Western counterparts through contacts made during the Crusades; at Muslim universities and centres of learning in Muslim Spain (al-Andalus, or Andalusia) and Sicily to which many European students went for education; and at the universities and centres of learning in Europe itself (such as Salerno, Padua, Montpellier, Paris, and Oxford), where Islamic works were taught in Latin translations. Among the Muslim scholars well-known in the centres of learning throughout the world were al-Rāzī (Rhazes), Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna), Ibn Rushd (Averroes), al-Khwārizmī and Ibn Khaldūn. Muslim scholars such as these and others produced original works in many fields. Many of them possessed encyclopaedic knowledge and distinguished themselves in many disparate fields of knowledge.

The Center for Muslim Contribution to Civilization was established in order to acquaint non-Muslims with the contributions Islam has made to human civilization as a whole. The Great Books of Islamic Civilization Project attempts to cover the first 800 years of Islam, or what may be called Islam's Classical Period. This project aims at making available in English and other European languages a wide selection of works representative of Islamic civilization in all its diversity. It is made up of translations of original Arabic works that were produced in the formative centuries of Islam, and is meant to serve the needs of a potentially large readership. Not only the specialist and scholar, but the non-specialist with an interest in Islam and its cultural heritage will be able to benefit from the series. Together, the works should serve as a rich source for the study of the early periods of Islamic thought.

In selecting the books for the series, the Center took into account all major areas of Islamic intellectual pursuit that could be represented. Thus the series includes works not only on better-known subjects such as law, theology, jurisprudence, history and politics, but also on subjects such as literature, medicine, astronomy, optics and geography. The specific criteria used to select individual books were these: that a book should give a faithful and comprehensive account of its field; and that it should be an authoritative source. The reader thus has at his disposal virtually a whole library of informative and enlightening works.

Each book in the series has been translated by a qualified scholar and reviewed by another expert. While the style of one translation will naturally differ from another as do the styles of the authors, the translators have endeavoured, to

the extent it was possible, to make the works accessible to the common reader. As a rule, the use of footnotes has been kept to a minimum, though a more extensive use of them was necessitated in some cases.

This series is presented in the hope that it will contribute to a greater understanding in the West of the cultural and intellectual heritage of Islam and will therefore provide an important means towards greater understanding of today's world.

May God Help Us!

Muhammad bin Hamad Al-Thani
Chairman of the Board of Trustees

ABOUT THIS SERIES

THIS series of Arabic works, made available in English translation, represents an outstanding selection of important Islamic studies in a variety of fields of knowledge. The works selected for inclusion in this series meet specific criteria. They are recognized by Muslim scholars as being early and important in their fields, as works whose importance is broadly recognized by international scholars, and as having had a genuinely significant impact on the development of human culture.

Readers will therefore see that this series includes a variety of works in the purely Islamic sciences, such as Qurʾān, *ḥadīth*, theology, prophetic traditions (*sunna*), and jurisprudence (*fiqh*). Also represented will be books by Muslim scientists on medicine, astronomy, geography, physics, chemistry, horticulture, and other fields.

The work of translating these texts has been entrusted to a group of professors in the Islamic and Western worlds who are recognized authorities in their fields. It has been deemed appropriate, in order to ensure accuracy and fluency, that two persons, one with Arabic as his mother tongue and another with English as his mother tongue, should participate together in the translation and revision of each text.

This series is distinguished from other similar intercultural projects by its distinctive objectives and methodology. These works will fill a genuine gap in the library of human thought. They will prove extremely useful to all those with an interest in Islamic culture, its interaction with Western thought, and its impact on culture throughout the world. They will, it is hoped, fulfil an important rôle in enhancing world understanding at a time when there is such evident and urgent need for the development of peaceful coexistence.

This series is published by the Center for Muslim Contribution to Civilization, which serves as a research centre under the patronage of H.H. Sheikh Muhammad bin Hamad al-Thani, the former Minister of Education of Qatar who also chairs the Board of Trustees. The Board is comprised of a group of prominent scholars. These include His Eminence Sheikh Al-Azhar, Arab Republic of Egypt, and Dr Yousef al-Qaradhwī, Director of the Sira and Sunna Research Center. At its inception the Center was directed by the late Dr Muhammad Ibrahim Kazim, former Rector of Qatar University, who established its initial objectives.

The Center was until recently directed by Dr Kamal Naji, the Foreign Cultural Relations Advisor of the Ministry of Education of Qatar. He was assisted by a Board comprising a number of academicians of Qatar University, in addition to a consultative committee chaired by Dr Ezzeddin Ibrahim, former Rector of the University of the United Arab Emirates. A further committee

acting on behalf of the Center has been the prominent university professors who act under the chairmanship of Dr Raji Rammuny, Professor of Arabic at the University of Michigan. This committee is charged with making known, in Europe and in America, the books selected for translation, and in selecting and enlisting properly qualified university professors, orientalists and students of Islamic studies to undertake the work of translation and revision, as well as overseeing the publication process.

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Following are the names of the late prominent Muslim figures who (may Allāh have mercy upon them) passed away after they had taken vital roles in the preliminary discussions of the Center's goals, work plan and activities. They are:

1. Dr Kamal Naji, former General Supervisor, Center for Muslim Contribution to Civilization, Qatar (7 October 1997).
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University of Michigan, U.S.A.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the individuals and institutions who have helped me to realize this translation project. My heartfelt gratitude goes to my colleague Professor Raji Rammuny, who commissioned me to translate al-Qushayri's masterpiece on behalf of the Center for Research on the Muslim Contribution to Civilization located in the city of Doha, Qatar. My translation has benefited significantly from the comments and corrections of the reviewer, Dr. Muhammad Eissa, whose meticulous attention to detail deserves the highest praise. My English text was carefully proof-read and edited by my research assistant Victoria (Vika) Gardner, an expert on Central Asian Sufism. Vika's help was absolutely invaluable in improving my English style and rectifying my thinking about Sufism in general and that of al-Qushayri in particular. Last but not least, I would like to thank my wife Anya Knysh for her help in compiling the index and the glossary. I take full responsibility for any mistakes that may have crept into my translation.

Alexander Knysh
University of Michigan

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THE TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

In this translation I followed certain conventions that require a brief explanation. First, I have retained all chains of transmission of the pious dicta quoted by al-Qushayri as well as the traditional formulas that are commonly attached to the names of God and the prophets in pre-modern Islamic texts. I have also reproduced the usual Islamic formulas mentioned after the names of deceased individuals, such as “may God be pleased with him” and “may God have mercy on him”.

Second, I have included both the traditional Islamic (or *Hijri*) dates and the dates according to the Common Era calendar – for example, 165/781, 406/1016, 420/1029 and so on. I have retained the Arabic definite article *al-* in all personal names, but omitted it in most Arabic terms cited in parentheses – for example, “contentment” (*rida*), instead of (*al-rida*) and “trust in God” (*tawakkul*), instead of (*al-tawakkul*).

Third, I have left all the pronominal references to God (*Allah*) in the masculine spelled with the upper case. This reflects the usage current in the pre-modern epoch before the rise of gender-inclusive language. Although in principle the frequently used word “servant of God” may apply to both males and females, I have opted for the masculine pronoun that is used consistently in medieval Arabic texts in such cases.

Fourth, quotations from the Qurʾan are placed into the footnotes with the number of the chapter (*sura*) followed by a colon and the number of the verse (*aya*). Since I have used Arthur J. Arberry’s *The Koran Interpreted* as my primary source of Qurʾanic quotations, I provide the numbering he adopted in his translation, which occasionally departs from the standard numbering used in the majority of editions and translations of the Qurʾan. Despite its archaic Victorian English, I still prefer Arberry’s translation to all later renditions of the Qurʾan into English. Occasionally, I modify Arberry’s translation to fit the overall context of al-Qushayri’s exposition.

Fifth, square brackets [] serve to indicate my addition of words and phrases to the original Arabic text where I think they are implied, but not explicitly mentioned. Occasionally, brackets (along with footnotes) may be used to clarify obscure passages in the Arabic original. Slash signs // mark the beginning of a new page of the Arabic original – namely, Muhammad ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Mar‘ashali’s edition of al-Qushayri’s text (see my *Introduction*).

The system of transliteration of Arabic names and words is based on a simplified version of the transliteration adopted by the editorial board of the *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, as stipulated in the “Guidelines for Translators and Reviewers of Great Books of Islamic Civilization”.

"Simplified" means that I do not use macroned letters to convey long Arabic vowels, nor do I use dots under certain letters of the Latin alphabet, which in academic literature represent velarized, or "emphatic", Arabic consonants. In a limited number of cases, when it is absolutely unavoidable, I use letters *á*, *í*, and *ú* to convey the long Arabic vowels. Their significance is explained in the footnotes. I mark the Arabic letter *ʿayn* with the inverted *ʿ* in every position and the *hamza* with *ʾ* only when it appears in the middle or at the end of a word or name.

Finally, I make use of several abbreviations, namely: *EI*, which stands for *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edition; *IM*, which stands for my book *Islamic Mysticism: A Short History*; and "b.", which stands for the Arabic word "ibn", meaning "son".

The translation is supplied with an Index of proper names, toponyms, and concepts and a Glossary of Sufi technical terms (see pages 417–425). Since al-Qushayri often quotes only an abbreviated name of his source and since many such names are identical, the individual in question is not always easy to identify. In such cases, I refer the reader to two or several possible individuals with similar names in the Index. I apologize for any inconvenience this might cause, but things that were obvious for al-Qushayri and his contemporaries are, unfortunately, no longer obvious for us.

TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

Al-Qushayri's "Epistle on Sufism": The author and his book

The author of the *Epistle on Sufism*, Abu 'l-Qasim 'Abd al-Karim b. Hawazin al-Qushayri, was born in 376/986 in the region of Ustuwa (or Ustawa), a district in northern Khurasan that was famous for the fertility of its soil and abundant grain production.¹ His parents were Arab settlers whose ancestors had arrived in Iran with the conquering Arab armies and were allotted substantial tracts of land in compensation for their military service. By the time of al-Qushayri's birth, his family must have been speaking Persian at home, but as a son of a country squire he was educated in the intricacies of Arabic language, poetry and polite letters (*adab*). As was common for young men of his social standing he was also trained in martial arts, horsemanship and archery. As a youth al-Qushayri traveled to Nishapur (Naysabur), the political and administrative center of Khurasan and a major center of Islamic scholarship and culture in the eastern part of the Muslim world up to the Mongol conquest of the seventh/thirteenth century.² There he attended the lectures and sermons of the renowned Sufi master (*shaykh*) Abu 'Ali al-Hasan al-Daqqaq (d. around 405/1015 or somewhat later), who headed a popular religious school (*madrasa*).³ A student of Ibrahim b. Muhammad al-Nasrabadhi (d. 367/977), the foremost Sufi master of Khurasan in his age, al-Daqqaq belonged to the spiritual tradition that stretched back to the celebrated Sufis of the Baghdad school, including [al-]Sari al-Saqati (d. 251/865 or somewhat later),⁴ al-Junayd al-Baghdadi (d. 297/910), and Abu Bakr al-Shibli (d. 334/946). Al-Qushayri soon became al-Daqqaq's foremost disciple, married his daughter Fatima and eventually succeeded his father-in-law as the head of his religious school. Al-Qushayri repeatedly acknowledges his debt to, and admiration for, his Sufi master throughout his *Epistle*. Al-Daqqaq was instrumental in introducing al-Qushayri to another outstanding Sufi authority of Khurasan, Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami (412/1021), who is quoted on almost every page of the *Epistle*.

A prolific writer and accomplished religious scholar, al-Sulami is rightly considered to be one of the master architects of the classical Sufi tradition along

1 It presently belongs to the district of Quchan (Iran).

2 Some sources say that he was fifteen years old at the time of his arrival in Nishapur, but this information is impossible to verify. It is also related that the object of his trip to Nishapur was to reduce the taxes on a village he owned.

3 While this term presupposes a more-or-less structured institution and a set curriculum, one should rather think of an informal circle of students attending the daily lectures and sermons of a popular teacher (*ustadh*), which usually took place at his house.

4 See Alexander Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism: A Short History* (henceforth abbreviated as *IM*), pp. 48-66.

with Abu Nasr al-Sarraj al-Tusi (d. 378/988),⁵ Abu Bakr al-Kalabadhi (d. ca 380/990), Abu Talib al-Makki (d. 386/996), 'Ali b. 'Uthman al-Jullabi al-Hujwiri (d. between 465/1072 and 469/1077), and 'Abdallah al-Ansari al-Harawi (d. 481/1089).⁶ Despite his preoccupation with the Sufi lore and literature, al-Qushayri's studies at Nishapur were not limited to Sufism. He studied Shafi'i jurisprudence under the guidance of Muhammad b. Bakr al-Tusi (d. 420/1029) and speculative theology with some leading Ash'arite scholars of the age, such as Abu Bakr b. Furak (d. 406/1015) and Abu Ishaq al-Isfaraini (d. 418/1027). Somewhat later he went on a pilgrimage in the company of the famous exegetes and *hadith*-collectors Abu Muhammad al-Juwayni (d. 438/1047) and Ahmad al-Bayhaqi (d. 458/1066). A diligent student of the Prophet's Sunna, al-Qushayri "studied *hadith* with at least seventeen different authorities, and in turn transmitted *hadith* to as many as sixty-six students."⁷ While his master al-Daqqaq was still alive, al-Qushayri did not seem to undertake any travels outside of Khurasan. After the city fell under the control of the powerful Saljuq dynasty in 429/1038 al-Qushayri was embroiled in the struggle between the rival scholarly factions of Hanafites and Shafi'ites which competed with one another for ideological ascendancy. In 436/1045 al-Qushayri asserted his position as the leading spokesman of the Shafi'i-Ash'arite party of Nishapur by issuing a manifesto in defense of its orthodoxy. His advocacy of the Ash'arite theological tenets aroused the ire of its Hanafite opponents. When the powerful Saljuq vizier 'Amid al-Mulk al-Kunduri threw in his lot with al-Qushayri's Hanafite-Mu'tazilite opponents, he was arrested and spent a week in the citadel of Nishapur only to be released after his followers threatened an all-out rebellion of the city's Shafi'ites in 446/1054. In 448/1056 he accepted the invitation of the caliph al-Qa'im to hold *hadith* sessions at the caliphal palace in Baghdad. Upon his return to Khurasan al-Qushayri had to settle down in Tus,⁸ since Nishapur was still controlled by his Hanafite adversaries. When, in 455/1063, Nizam al-Mulk, the new Saljuq vizier, reversed al-Kunduri's policies and endeavored to reestablish the balance of power between the Shafi'ite and Hanafite parties, al-Qushayri, by then seventy-nine (lunar) years old, was able to return to his native city where he remained until his death in 465/1072. His six sons by his first wife Fatima became respected scholars in their own right and spread the fame of the al-Qushayri family far and wide.⁹ Despite his great renown and the interest he took in Sufi pedagogy,¹⁰ al-Qushayri left surprisingly few disciples. Of these Abu 'Ali Fadl b. Muhammad al-Farmadhi (d. 477/1084),

5 This author is also frequently quoted by al-Qushayri.

6 For these writers and their works see *IM*, pp. 116–135.

7 Hamid Algar, "Introduction," in *Principles of Sufism*, translated from the Arabic by B. R. von Schlegel, Mizan Press, Berkeley, 1990, p. iii.

8 A medieval city near present-day Meshhad/Mashhad (Iran).

9 He also had three sons by his second wife.

10 He maintained a Sufi lodge in Nishapur, where he trained his disciples.

a teacher of the great Muslim thinker Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali (d. 505/1111), was by far the most famous. This paucity of spiritual successors may be attributed in part to al-Qushayri's persona which was academic and methodical rather than charismatic and inspirational.

Al-Qushayri's written legacy includes a long Qur'anic commentary entitled *Lata'if al-isharat*, which deserves a special mention.¹¹ Here, as in the *Epistle*, the author pursues a clear apologetic agenda: the advocacy of the teachings, values and practices of "moderate", "Junayd-style" Sufism with a view to demonstrating its full compliance with the precepts of Ash'arite theology, which al-Qushayri regarded as the only "orthodox" creed. Written in 410/1019, this work consistently draws a parallel between the gradual exegetical progress from the literal to the subtlest meanings (*lata'if*) of the Qur'anic revelation and the stages of the Sufi's spiritual and experiential journey to God. The success of the exegetical progress and that of the Sufi journey depends on the wayfarer's ability to combine the performance of pious works and feats of spirit with sound doctrinal premises. Giving preference to one over the other will result in failure. Even when this delicate balance is successfully struck, the exegete is still in need of divine assistance in grasping the subtleties of the divine revelation. The same is true of the Sufi seeker's striving toward God – here too one cannot succeed without God's constant guidance and assistance.

Prominent in al-Qushayri's intellectual universe is the notion of a privileged, intuitive knowledge of both God and his word that God grants only to his most intimate, elect "friends", the *amlīya*. This idea is stated clearly in the introduction to the *Lata'if al-isharat*: "[God] has honored the elect (*asfiya*) among His servants by [granting them] the understanding of His subtle secrets (*lata'if asrarīh*) and His lights so that they can see the secret allusions and hidden signs contained therein [in the Qur'an]. He has shown their innermost souls hidden things so that by the emanations of the unseen which He has imparted solely to them they can become aware of that which is concealed from all others. Then they have started to speak according to their degrees [of spiritual attainment] and capabilities and God – praise be to Him – inspired in them things by which He has honored them [to the exclusion of other people]. So, they now speak on behalf of Him, inform about the subtle truths that He has imparted them, and point to Him ...". The exegete's progress toward the innermost meaning of the scripture is described by al-Qushayri as a movement from the intellect to the heart (*al-qalb*), then to the spirit (*al-ruh*), then to the innermost secret (*al-sirr*) and, finally, to the secret of secrets (*sirr al-sirr*) of the Qur'anic revelation. As one may expect of a Sufi master, al-Qushayri showed little interest in the historical and legal aspects of the Qur'anic text. For him, they serve as mere windows onto the all-important spiritual and mystical ideas and values of Sufism. Thus, in discussing the spoils of war mentioned in Q. 8:41 al-Qushayri argues: "*Jihad* can be of two

11 Ed. Ibrahim Basyuni, 4 vols., Dar al-kitab al-ʿarabi, Cairo, 1968.

types: the external one [waged] against the infidels and the internal one [waged] against [one's] soul and Satan. In the same way as the lesser *jihad* involves [the seizure of] spoils of war after victory, the greater *jihad* too has the spoils of war of its own, which involves taking possession of his soul by the servant of God after it has been held by his two enemies – [his] passions and Satan.” A similar parallel is drawn between ordinary fasting which involves abstention from food, sex, and drink and the spiritual abstention of the Sufi from the allure of this world and from seeking the approval of its inhabitants. Despite its overall “moderate” nature, the *Lata'if al-isharat* is not devoid of the monistic and visionary elements that characterize what is usually described as the more “bold” and “esoteric” trend in Sufi literature. This aspect of al-Qushayri's exegesis comes to the fore in his interpretation of Q. 7:143, in which Moses comes to God at an appointed time and requests that He appear to him only to be humbled by the sight of a mountain crumbling to dust, when God shows Himself to it. Al-Qushayri comments: “Moses came to God as [only] those passionately longing and madly in love could. Moses came without Moses. Moses came, yet nothing of Moses was left to Moses. Thousands of men have traversed great distances, yet no one remembers them, while that Moses made [only] a few steps and [school]children will be reciting until the Day of Judgment: ‘When Moses came...’” Despite such deeply esoteric passages, al-Qushayri's commentary remains a typical sample of “moderate” Sufi literature due to its author's overriding desire to achieve a delicate balance between the mystical, esoteric aspects of the Scripture and his deep respect for its letter, or, in the Sufi parlance, between the *shari'a* and the *haqiqa*. One should point out that al-Qushayri is also the author of a conventional historical-philological and legal *tafsir* entitled *al-Taysir fi 'l-tafsir*, which is said to have been written before 410/1019. This is an eloquent testimony to his dual credentials as both a Sufi and a conventional Sunni scholar (*'alim*).

Although in his works al-Qushayri addressed a wide variety of subjects,¹² his fame rests primarily on his *Epistle on Sufism* – probably the most popular Sufi manual ever. Written in 437/1045, it has served as a primary text-book for many generations of Sufis down to the present and is considered to be essential reading for any serious Muslim mystic. Al-Qushayri's *Epistle* carries a clear apologetic message – to portray Sufism as a legitimate and respectable Islamic “science” in complete harmony with the letter and spirit of Islamic Law, the *shari'a*. The author is careful to differentiate between the genuine Sufis and their imitators, whose irresponsible escapades and statements, in his view, have tainted its image in the eyes of outsiders, especially authoritative Sunni scholars. Throughout his book, al-Qushayri consistently seeks to cleanse Sufism of what he perceives as “unbecoming” beliefs and practices, to expose its unscrupulous imitators, and to

12 For a list of al-Qushayri's published works see Richard Gramlich, “Introduction (Einleitung),” in his *Das Sendschreiben al-Qushayri's über das Sufitum*, Franz Steiner Verlag, Wiesbaden, 1989, p. 17.

instruct its followers in the exemplary ways of the movement's founding fathers. At the same time, he does not try to conceal from his readers disagreements among Sufi masters over various doctrinal and practical issues.

The *Epistle* consists of several sections. It opens with a relatively short chapter that describes the doctrines of "this [Sufi] community (*ta'ifa*)". It unequivocally demonstrates al-Qushayri's unshakable allegiance to the Ash'arite creed and seeks to assert Sufism's close links to this influential theological school in Sunni Islam. The second section includes 83 biographies of earlier Sufi masters beginning with the semi-legendary figure of Ibrahim b. Adham (d. 162/778) and ending with Ahmad al-Rudhbari (d. 369/960) who had died some six years before the author was born. The biographies are arranged in a roughly chronological order and correspond closely to those found in al-Sulami's "The Generations of Sufis" (*Tabaqat al-sufiyya*), which contains 103 Sufi biographies. Like al-Sulami, al-Qushayri provides a brief summary of biographical data pertaining to each Sufi master, followed by a selection of their statements on various aspects of "Sufi science". In the introduction to the biographical section al-Qushayri takes pains to present the Sufis as the rightful heirs to the Prophet and his pious Companions. Simultaneously, the author bemoans the decline of the originally high moral and ethical standards of the earlier Sufi movement among the author's contemporaries – a *leitmotif* that reappears repeatedly throughout the subsequent narrative. The biographical section is followed by a detailed essay on Sufi terminology. It provides detailed explanations of twenty-seven Sufi terms (complete with etymology and philological analysis) current among al-Qushayri's generation of Sufis. Here quotations of authoritative statements of Sufi masters (both living and dead) are combined with al-Qushayri's own interpretative interventions as well as frequent references to the Qur'an and the Prophet's custom, or Sunna.

The terminological section leads to the systematic one, which describes the major "stations" (*maqamat*) and "states" (*ahwal*) of the mystical path. This part of the *Epistle* exhibits the author's penchant for a fine psychological analysis and his profound understanding of the experiences of mystical wayfarers, from the novice (*murid*) to the accomplished Sufi master (*shaykh*). The concluding chapters discuss the moral and ethical dilemmas that the Sufis face in the course of their progress along the Sufi path as well as the rules of proper behavior, or "good manners" that they must observe in order to succeed in their spiritual undertaking. In particular, the author examines Sufi attitudes toward "spiritual concerts" (*sama'*), travel, death, saintly miracles, visions and dreams, etc. The book is concluded with the author's advice to Sufi novices, which recapitulates and brings into sharp relief the principal themes and rules of proper behavior elucidated in the previous sections.

Generally speaking, al-Qushayri's *Epistle* can be viewed as falling into two distinct sections: the biographical, which attests to the exemplary piety of Sufism's early heroes and their complete religious orthodoxy, and the didactic, which summarizes their teachings, customs and attitudes. According to the apt observation of a contemporary Western student of al-Qushayri's masterpiece,

the former serves as the authoritative “support” (*isnad*) of the latter, which presents the main body (*matn*) of Sufi doctrine and practice, in the same way as the chain of authoritative transmitters validates the content of a prophetic report (*hadith*).¹³ To push this parallel even further one can say that the numerous quotations from the Qur'an and the Sunna that richly punctuate al-Qushayri's narrative fulfill the same “supporting” function by validating Sufi concepts, terminology, life-style, and behavior. The author's extensive knowledge of Sufi lore allows him to put it to a wide variety of different uses. One and the same anecdote reappears in different contexts and is deployed to fulfill different didactic functions. Yet, the author's overall strategy remains the same: to educate his readers by the pious precedent, to instill in them admiration for the exemplary ethos of the Sufi masters of old and to encourage them to implement it in their own lives. The continuing relevance of the *Epistle* to the spiritual aspirations of modern Muslims, Sufis and non-Sufis alike, serves as the best evidence of al-Qushayri's remarkable success in achieving his goals.

Despite its obvious normative and didactic agenda and formulaic presentation, the *Epistle* does give the modern reader an illuminating insight into the everyday lives of Sufi devotees and the moral dilemmas and challenges they faced in trying to strike a delicate balance between their ascetic and mystical values and the exigencies of life in a society governed by rank, wealth, and political power. In al-Qushayri's narrative the indigent, downtrodden but righteous always triumph over the wealthy, powerful but impious. God always comes to the rescue of the former and abandons or humbles the latter. In a sense, the Sufi devotees are the true, if uncrowned, “kings” of this world,¹⁴ not those worldly rulers who may appear to be lording it over the common herd of believers. Yet, whenever God's righteous “friends” (*awliya' Allah*) abandon or compromise their pious convictions in the expectation of mundane benefits or comforts, they are swiftly punished by God for their “perfidy”. This theme runs like a red thread across the entire texture of al-Qushayri's momentous work. It is intimately linked to another critical theme, that of salvation, which, according to the author of the *Epistle*, even the most advanced Sufi masters and “friends of God” should not take for granted until they die and face God's judgement in the Hereafter. Only after that may they be allowed by God to appear to their former peers and disciples in dreams to inform them of their condition in the afterlife. Even miracle-working, no matter how spectacular, cannot guarantee one a “favorable outcome” in the afterlife, for it may be nothing but a ruse on the part of God aimed at testing the integrity and faith of His servant. These themes are illustrated over and over throughout the entire text of the *Epistle* by the anecdotes

13 Jawid Mojaddedi, *The Biographical Tradition in Sufism*, Curzon Press, Richmond, Surrey, 2001, p. 123.

14 As explicitly stated in an anonymous Sufi treatise from the fourth/tenth century; see *Adab al-muluk: Ein Handbuch zur islamischen Mystik aus dem 4./10. Jahrhundert*, ed. Bernd Radtke, Franz Steiner, Beirut, 1991.

and parables that show al-Qushayri's fellow Sufis in a wide variety of contexts: suffering from hunger and thirst in the desert, performing pilgrimage to Mecca, participating in "spiritual concerts", reciting the Qur'an, waging war against the "infidel" Christian enemy in the marches of Iberia and Anatolia, earning their livelihood, studying under the guidance of a Sufi master, meditating in a retreat, praying and supplicating, working miracles, interacting with the "people of the market-place", their family members and peers, dreaming, and dying. The reader is invited to explore the fascinating world of Islamic ascetic and mystical piety carefully assembled for us by the author.

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In my translation I have relied on several editions of al-Qushayri's *Epistle*, namely, that by 'Abd al-Halim Mahmud and Mahmud b. al-Sharaf¹⁵ and that by Muhammad 'Abd al-Rahman al-Mar'ashali.¹⁶ I have also used two uncritical editions of al-Qushayri's text, one from Cairo and another from Damascus.¹⁷ The quality of all these editions, including both "critical" ones, leave much to be desired. Furthermore, these "critical" editions are practically identical and do not complement each other. I have also made use of the comments provided by the German translator of the *Risala*, Richard Gramlich,¹⁸ who had in his possession two manuscript copies of the text. I take this opportunity to acknowledge my indebtedness to Gramlich's translation, which I used extensively throughout my own work on this difficult text. I have also collated my translation with two available English ones – a partial one by Barbara von Schlegell that omits all chains of transmission of the pious logia, the biographical section and the latter chapters pertaining to Sufi etiquette, practices, morals and ethics;¹⁹ and a complete one²⁰ by Rabia Harris, which relegates the chains of transmission to the appendix. While the former is quite readable and relatively accurate (albeit practically devoid of commentary), the latter is but a free paraphrase of the Arabic text, which is frequently misconstrued and, consequently, mistranslated. Harris's translation, too, has no commentary.

Alexander D. Knysh

15 *Al-Risala al-qushayriyya*, Dar al-kutub al-haditha, Cairo, 2 vols., 1966.

16 *Al-Risala al-qushayriyya fi 'ilm al-tasawwuf*, Dar ihya' al-turath al-'arabi, Beirut, 1998; I used this later edition to indicate page correspondences between the Arabic text and its English translation.

17 *Al-Risala al-qushayriyya fi 'ilm al-tasawwuf*, with commentaries by Zakariya al-Ansari, Dar al-kutub al-'arabiyya al-kubra, Mustafa al-Babi al-Halabi, Cairo, 1276 A.H. (1859 C.E.) and *Al-Risala al-qushayriyya*, with commentaries by Mustafa al-'Arusi and Zakariya al-Ansari, 'Abd al-Wakil al-Darubi and Tasin 'Arafa, Jami' al-Darwishyya, 2 vols., Damascus, no date.

18 *Das Sendschreiben al-Quşayris über das Sufitum*, Franz Steiner Verlag, Wiesbaden, 1989.

19 *Principles of Sufism by al-Qushayri*; translated from the Arabic by B. R. von Schlegell with an introduction by Hamid Algar, Mizan Press, Berkeley, CA, 1990.

20 *The Risalah: Principles of Sufism*, translated by Rabia Harris, edited by Laleh Bakhtiar, Kazi Publications, Chicago, IL, 2002. It has several minor omissions toward the end of the text, but can be considered complete for practical purposes.

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AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate

Praise be to God Who has no rival in the greatness of His sovereignty, Who is unique in the splendor of His might, Who is dignified in the supremacy of His oneness, Who is made holy by the exaltation of His eternity, to Whose Magnitude of Essence there is no likeness or challenger, and Who is elevated in His attributes above any limitation or deficiency! His are the attributes that pertain to none but Him alone and His are the signs that testify that He is not similar to His creatures. Blessed is He, the possessor of the highest dignity! There is no boundary¹ to encircle him, no device to entrap Him, no time to confine Him! No one can be His helper, there can be no offspring next to Him, no number to count Him, no place to contain Him, no time period to embrace Him, no understanding to measure him, and no imagination to picture Him.

Far removed is He from such questions as “How is He?”, “Where is He?”, or statements such as “Through His creation He has acquired beauty”, or “Through His actions He removed from Himself imperfection and deficiency”. For “Nothing is like unto Him, He is the Hearing, the Seeing.”² No living thing can overcome Him, omniscient is He and omnipotent! I praise Him for what He possesses and what He produces. I thank Him for what He withholds and what He bestows. I place my trust in Him and am satisfied with Him. I am content with what He gives and what He does not give.

I testify that that there is no deity but God and that He has no partners. This is the testimony of the one who has absolute confidence in His uniqueness and the one who seeks to secure His assistance. I also testify that our lord Muhammad is His elected servant and his handpicked trustee and that he is God's messenger to all His creatures. May God bless him and his family, [who shine like] lights in the darkness. May God bless his Companions, [who are] the keys to the True Guidance.³ And may God greet them all with numerous greetings!//12

This is an epistle that the poor one in need of God Most High, ‘Abd al-Karim b. Hawazin al-Qushayri, has addressed to all the Sufi community in the lands of Islam in the year 437.⁴

1 The Arabic word *hadd* used here may also mean “definition”.

2 Qur'an (hereafter Q.) 42:11. Unless stated otherwise, translations of the Qur'an quoted in the text are from Arthur J. Arberry (trans.), *The Koran Interpreted*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1996.

3 That is, the religion of Islam.

4 1045 C.E.

And now to the main topic – may God be pleased with you! God has made this community⁵ His friends of choice⁶ and placed them above the rest of His servants and immediately after His messengers and prophets, may God bless and greet them! He has rendered the hearts of the Sufis repositories of His mysteries and marked them off from the other members of His Community by His resplendent light. They are the saviors of all other creatures, who in each and every state of theirs remain with God and through God. He has cleansed them of the turbidity of human nature and elevated them, through the realities of His oneness that were revealed to them, to the vantages from which they contemplate God. And He has granted them success in acquiring the good manners in serving their God and He has given them insights into the working of the decrees dispensed by their Lord. In this way they have become capable of fulfilling all the obligations imposed upon them by God and realized in the most perfect manner all His dispensations in their regard.

Then they returned to God, may He be glorified and exalted, through the sincerity of their need [of God] and in the state of humility; they refused to rely on the good works they had done or on the pure spiritual states that had been bestowed upon them. For they knew that God, may He be great and elevated, does what He wishes and selects any one of His servants He wants, while His creatures cannot pass judgements on Him, nor can any creature have any right against Him. His award is the beginning of all beneficence, His punishment is the just verdict, and His command is the final judgement.//13

Know – may God show mercy to you! – that the majority of those true Sufis have become extinct and, in our age, nothing is left of them but their traces. As a poet put it,

As for the tents, they look like their tents

And yet I see that the women of the tribe are not the ones who used to live in them.

This [Sufi] path⁷ has been overcome by weakness, nay the path has in fact completely disappeared. Gone are the [Sufi] elders,⁸ in whom one could find guidance; few are the young men, whose [exemplary] deeds and customs deserve

5 *Hadhihi 'l-ta'ifa*, i.e., the Sufis.

6 *Awliya'*, sing. *wali*. This term, which in Arabic means “close friend” or “protégé”, is usually translated into Western languages as “saints”; in what follows we shall translate this word as “friend(s) of God”.

7 *Tariqa* (lit. “way” or “path”); this term denotes both the spiritual method peculiar to a given Sufi master and the Sufi institution founded upon it. In the latter meaning, it is similar to a monastic order in Christianity or Buddhism. See *IM*, pp. 301–303.

8 *Shuyukh*; sing. *shaykh*. In what follows this term will be translated as either “elder” or “[Sufi] master”.

to be emulated. Scrupulosity has disappeared from this world and rolled up its prayer rug, whereas greed has gained strength and tightened its stranglehold. Respect for the Divine Law has departed from the hearts of men and they have chosen the neglect of religion as their support and rejected the difference between the permissible and the forbidden. They have made disrespect and shamelessness their religion. They have set no store in the devotional acts and become remiss in fasting and praying; they have galloped around in the field of neglectfulness and leaned toward those who blindly follow their lusts. They have thought little about committing sinful deeds. At the same time, they have availed themselves freely of the things they borrow from the commoners, women and rulers.

However, they are not satisfied with indulging in all these evil deeds. They have begun to refer to the highest [divine] mysteries and [mystical] states and to claim that they have freed themselves from the bondage of servility and attained the realities of divine union. They also claim that they reside in God, Who rules over them with His decrees, and that they have become completely obliterated in Him. Therefore, God cannot condemn or blame them for what they do and what they do not do. They have also claimed that the mysteries of divine oneness are unveiled to them, that their souls are taken away from them completely [unto God] and that they have lost the properties of their human natures. After having been completely annihilated [in God], they have found themselves in the presence of God's eternal light. Therefore, when they speak, it is someone else who speaks on their behalf and when they act, it is someone else who performs their acts for them, or rather, they are caused to act by someone else.^{14//} Although in this age of ours we have suffered a lot from this affliction, some of which I have just shown, I have restrained my tongue from lengthy condemnations. I have done this out of concern for this [Sufi] path, for one should not speak ill of its people.⁹ One should not give their opponents a cause to condemn them, since in this country, the suffering of this path at the hands of its opponents and accusers has been particularly severe. I do hope that the cause of this weakness will be removed and God, glory be to Him, in His graciousness, will warn those who have strayed from the [Prophet's] exemplary custom by abandoning the good manners of this path. Since our age keeps bringing only more and more difficulties and the majority of our compatriots continue to stubbornly adhere to their [corrupt] ways and to blindly persist in their delusions, I have begun to fear that the hearts of men might think that this whole affair¹⁰ from the very beginning rested upon all those [faulty] foundations and that its early adherents followed the same [corrupt] habits. So I have composed this epistle for you, may God generously reward you! In it I have mentioned the lives of the masters of this path, their good manners, their high morals, their relationships with one another, their beliefs that they hold in their hearts as well as their ecstatic states they allude to and the characteristics of their spiritual ascent from the beginning to the

9 That is, the Sufis.

10 That is, Sufism.

end. In this way, this epistle would give strength to the followers¹¹ of this path and make you testify that my presentation is correct. As for me, in spreading these laments¹² I shall have a diversion and from the generous God a favor and reward.

So I seek God's help in what I am about to mention and ask Him to protect and defend me from error in this undertaking. I plea to God for forgiveness and pardon. He alone deserves praise and He alone is capable of everything!//15

A chapter explaining the beliefs of the Sufis concerning the fundamentals of religion

Know, may God have mercy on you, that the elders of this path built the foundations of their affair upon the sound fundamental principles of God's oneness. In this way they protected their beliefs from [reprehensible] innovations and tried to bring themselves closer to the ways of the pious forefathers¹³ and the followers of the Prophet's Sunna,¹⁴ namely the doctrine of God's oneness that contained neither likening¹⁵ nor stripping.¹⁶ They knew well the true nature of God's eternity and realized fully how an existent entity emerges from non-existence.//16

It is this issue that the great master of this path al-Junayd,¹⁷ may God have mercy on him, mentioned when he said: "The [true] doctrine of oneness consists in separating the eternal from the originated." Thus, they strengthened the fundamentals of the religious belief by clear proofs and irrefutable evidence. Abu Muhammad al-Jurayri,¹⁸ may God have mercy on him, said: "He who does not learn the science of God's oneness by one of its evidential proofs, will place the foot of deception into the chasm of perdition." By this he meant that he who relies exclusively on blind imitation and is unable to contemplate directly the proofs of God's oneness, will stray from the path of salvation and enter the realm of destruction.

Upon looking into their words and examining their statements one will find out that their entire teachings and the quotations thereof confirm that this folk¹⁹ have not failed to realize their goal, nor have they diverged in their quest through any shortcoming.

11 *Muridun*; sing. *murid*. Lit. "seeker" or "aspirant", followers of a Sufi master.

12 That is, the author's complaints about the decline of contemporary Sufism from the originally high standards.

13 That is, the members of the first Muslim community in Medina and their immediate successors.

14 The code of exemplary behavior established by the Prophet and his Companions to be emulated by subsequent generations of the Muslims.

15 That is, ascribing to God the attributes of His creatures.

16 That is, declaring God to be devoid of any attributes.

17 The leader of the Baghdad school of Sufism, who died in 298/910. See *IM*, pp. 52–56.

18 A disciple of al-Junayd who succeeded him as the head of the Baghdad school of Sufism after his death. See *IM*, p. 66.

19 *Al-qawm* – that is, the Sufis.

In this section we shall mention a summary of their statements in which they deal with the problems of the fundamentals of religion. Then, God willing, we shall proceed to lay down in proper order a synopsis of necessary doctrines in a concise and brief manner.

I heard Shaykh 'Abd al-Rahman Muhammad b.²⁰ al-Husayn al-Sulami²¹ say: I heard 'Abdallah b./17 Musa al-Salami say: I heard Abu Bakr al-Shibli²² say: "The One²³ is known before any definition and before any letters".²⁴ This is an unequivocal statement from al-Shibli that the Essence of the Eternal – praise be to Him – has no definition, nor does His speech consist of letters. I heard that Abu Hatim al-Sufi said: I heard Abu Nasr al-Tusi²⁵ say: Someone asked Ruwaym²⁶ about the first duty that God – may He be great and exalted – imposed upon His creatures. Ruwaym answered: "Knowledge, because God – may His name be exalted – said: 'I have not created jinn and mankind except to worship Me.'"²⁷ Ibn 'Abbas²⁸ explained: "[That is,] except to know [God]."

Al-Junayd said: "The first act of wisdom required of the servant of God is that each work of art should know its artisan and that each originated thing should know how it came to be. This allows one to distinguish the Creator from His creatures and the Eternal from the originated thing. As a result, the servant of God submits to His call and acknowledges the necessity of obedience toward Him. If, however, one does not know one's owner, one cannot attribute ownership to whom it rightfully belongs."

Muhammad b. al-Husayn told me: I heard Muhammad b. 'Abdallah al-Razi say: I heard Abu 'l-Tayyib al-Maraghi say: "To the intellect belongs argumentative proof, to wisdom allegorical allusion and to mystical gnosis²⁹ direct witnessing. The intellect demonstrates, wisdom alludes, and gnosis witnesses directly the fact that the purest acts of worship can only be obtained by the purest belief in God's oneness."

Someone asked al-Junayd about God's oneness. He answered: "Rendering God one by realizing fully His uniqueness through the perfection of His

20 Here and henceforth the letter "b." stands for the Arabic "ibn" (son).

21 A major exponent of Sufism in Khurasan and a teacher of al-Qushayri, who died in 412/1021. See *IM*, pp. 125–127.

22 A famous Sufi of the Baghdad school who studied Sufism under al-Junayd; he died in 334/946. See *IM*, pp. 64–66.

23 That is, God.

24 *Huruf*, sing. *harf*. In Arabic, this word can mean both "letters" and "sounds".

25 Abu Nasr al-Sarraj al-Tusi (d. 378/988), a Khurasani exponent of Sufism who wrote the famous Sufi manual "The Book of the Essentials of Sufism" (*Kitab al-luma' fi 'l-tasawwuf*). For details see *IM*, pp. 118–120.

26 A famous Sufi master associated with the circle of al-Junayd. He died in 303/915.

27 *Q*. 51:56.

28 A cousin of the prophet Muhammad by his uncle al-'Abbas, Ibn [al-] 'Abbas distinguished himself as a collector of stories about the Prophet; he was also one of the first Muslim exegetes. He died around 68/686–7. See *EI*, "'Abdallah b. al-'Abbas".

29 *Ma'rifa*, a Sufi term for divinely inspired, intuitive knowledge of God and the world.

solitude, that is, that He is one and only, 'Who has not begotten and has not been begotten',³⁰ who has no opponents, rivals or likes, without likening Him [to created things], without asking 'how [He is]', without representing Him as an image or form, in accordance with [the verse] 'Like Him there is naught; He is the Hearing, the Seeing.'"³¹

Muhammad b. Ahmad b. Yahya the Sufi told me: 'Abdallah b. 'Ali al-Tamimi the Sufi told me: It was said that [Abu] al-Husayn b. 'Ali al-Damaghani said: Someone asked Abu Bakr al-Zahirabadhi about [divine] gnosis.//18 He answered: "Gnosis is a name. Its meaning consists in elevating [God] in the heart in such a way as to prevent you from either stripping [Him] of [His] attributes or likening [Him] to [His] creatures."

Abu 'l-Hasan al-Bushanji, may God have mercy on him, said: "God's oneness is to know that He is not similar to created essences, yet [at the same time] not devoid of His attributes."

Shaykh Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami – may God have mercy on Him – told us: I heard Muhammad b. Muhammad b. Ghalib say: I heard Abu Nasr Ahmad b. Sa'īd al-Isfanjani say: al-Husayn b. Mansur [al-Hallaj]³² said: "Consider everything to be originated in time (i.e., created), for eternity pertains to Him alone. Everything that has appeared [in this world] as a corporal being is bound with accidents. Everything that is assembled by means of an intermediary³³ is held together by its powers. Everything that is affiliated with a moment of time is [one day] abandoned by it.³⁴ Everything that is sustained by someone else is by necessity dependent on it. Everything that is subject to the imagination can be represented as an image. Everything that is contained by a place can be confined by a space. And everything that belongs to a certain category can be grasped by a qualifier. As for God – praise be upon Him – He cannot be protected by something above Him nor supported by something below Him.³⁵ He cannot be defined by something that preceded Him, no togetherness can appear next to Him, no behindness can follow Him, no in-frontness can grasp Him, no beforeness can prevail over Him, no afterness can annihilate Him. No term can comprehensively define Him, no becoming can add existence onto Him, no absence can cause Him to disappear.//19 There is no description of Him whatsoever; His actions have no cause; His existence has no end. He is far removed from the characteristics of His creatures, nor does He mix with them; His actions require no intermediary. He is distinct from His creatures through His eternity, while they are distinct from His through their origination in time.

30 Q. 112:3.

31 Q. 42:11.

32 A famous (and highly controversial) mystic of al-Junayd's circle, who was tried and executed as a heretic and troublemaker in Baghdad in 309/922. See *IM*, pp. 72–82.

33 That is, any body that was originated through something other than it and is possessed of various sensory and physical faculties.

34 That is, it dies.

35 That is, He cannot be subject to spatial descriptions.

If you ask “When?”, His being preceded all time. If you say *huwa*,³⁶ the [letters] *ha* and *waw* were created by Him. If you ask “Where?”, His existence was there before any place. The letters are but His signs; His existence is the confirmation of Him; His knowledge is the knowledge of His oneness; and the knowledge of His oneness is what makes Him distinct from His creatures. Whatever the imagination might fathom regarding Him, He will be different from it. How can anything that originated from Him dwell in Him? How can anything that He produced try to join Him? The eyes cannot contemplate Him nor can thought grasp Him. Closeness to Him is [a sign of] His beneficence; remoteness from Him is [a sign of] His neglect; His elevation takes place without climbing up;³⁷ His descent occurs without stepping down.³⁸ He is “the First and the Last, the Manifest and the Hidden”,³⁹ the Close and the Remote, “like Him there is naught; He is the Hearing, the Seeing”.⁴⁰

I heard Abu Hatim al-Sijistani say: I heard Abu Nasr al-Sarraj al-Tusi⁴¹ narrating on the authority of Yusuf b. al-Husayn⁴² who said: “A certain man came to Dhu’l-Nun al-Misri⁴³ and said: //20 ‘Tell me, what is God’s oneness?’ He [al-Misri] answered: ‘To understand that God’s power in all things [exists] without mixing, that He crafted them without any implements, that His act [of creation] is the cause of everything that He has crafted, that His act [of creation] had no cause; that neither in the skies above nor on the Earth below is there any planner but God and that whatever you may imagine by your fantasy, God is different from it.’” Al-Junayd said: “The doctrine of God’s oneness is your knowledge and confirmation that God was alone in His pre-eternity, with Whom there was no one, and that nothing can do what He does.”

Abu ‘Abdallah b. Khafif⁴⁴ said: “Faith consists in the heart’s acceptance of [the mysteries of] the Unknown that God communicates to it.” Abu ‘l-‘Abbas al-Sayyari⁴⁵ said: “God’s gifts are of two types: graces and afflictions. What He bestows upon you is a grace, while what He takes away from you is an affliction. Therefore, say: ‘I am a believer, God willing.’” Abu ‘l-‘Abbas was the [greatest Sufi] master of his time. I heard [my] teacher Abu ‘Ali al-Daqqaq – may God have mercy on him – say: “A man squeezed the leg of Abu ‘l-‘Abbas al-Sayyari.

36 That is, “He” (God).

37 That is, His elevation does not occur in a physical space.

38 A reference to the tradition according to which God descends to the lower heaven in order to communicate with His creatures.

39 Q. 57:3.

40 Q. 42:11.

41 On him see note 000.

42 Yusuf b. al-Husayn al-Razi (d. 304/916), a renowned Sufi from Rayy, Iran. See al-Sulami, *Tabaqat*, pp. 151–156.

43 A famous Sufi master from Upper Egypt, who died in 245/860. See *IM*, pp. 40–42.

44 A famous Sufi from Shiraz, who died in 371/982. See *IM*, pp. 79, 87, 118, and Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, “index”.

45 For his biography see later (p. 68).

He said: 'You are squeezing a leg that has never made a single step toward disobedience of God – may He be great and exalted!'" Abu Bakr al-Wasiti⁴⁶ said: "When someone says: 'I am a believer in God in truth', one should tell him: 'The true faith implies scrutiny, understanding and comprehension. If someone loses this, his claim to true faith is invalidated.'" ⁴⁷ By this he meant the teaching of the people of the [Prophet's] Sunna, according to which the true believer is destined to enter Paradise. If one has not known directly from the mystery of God's wisdom that he is a believer in truth, then his claim is false.

I heard Shaykh 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami say: I heard that Mansur b. 'Abdallah said://21 I heard Abu 'l-Husayn al-'Anbari say: I heard Sahl b. 'Abdallah al-Tustari⁴⁸ say: "Believers contemplate God with their eyes without comprehension and without ever reaching the limit of their understanding." Abu 'l-Husayn al-Nuri⁴⁹ said: "The Real⁵⁰ looked at the hearts of men and did not find a heart that had more passion for Him than the heart of Muhammad – may God bless and greet him. Therefore He bestowed upon him the Ascension⁵¹ in order to hasten the vision [of God by Muhammad] and [their] conversation."

I heard imam⁵² Abu Bakr Muhammad b. al-Hasan Ibn Furak⁵³ – may God have mercy upon him – say: I heard Muhammad b. al-Mahbub, a servant of Abu 'Uthman al-Maghribi,⁵⁴ say: "One day Abu 'Uthman told me: 'If someone said to you: "Muhammad, where is your God", what would you tell him?' [The servant] said: I answered: 'Where He has always been.' [Then Abu 'Uthman] said: 'And if this person asks, where God was in eternity, what would you say?' [The servant] said: I answered: '[He was] where He is now.' That is, as He was in no particular place before, so He is now.' [The servant] said: 'He was satisfied with my response and he took off his shirt and gave it to me.'"

I heard the imam Abu Bakr b. Furak – may God have mercy on him – say: I heard Abu 'Uthman al-Maghribi say: "I used to believe in the teaching [that

46 A Sufi of al-Junayd's circle, who emigrated to Central Asia (Marw) following the execution of al-Hallaj. He died around 320/932. See *IM*, pp. 100–101.

47 A mere oral proclamation that is not supported by personal conviction, experience and insight is not sufficient to become a true believer.

48 On this famous Sufi of Basra, who died in 283/896, see *IM*, pp. 83–88 and Böwering, *Mystical Vision*.

49 A famous Sufi of al-Junayd's circle who represents the erotic trend in Baghdad mysticism. He died in 295/907. See *IM*, pp. 60–63.

50 That is, God.

51 On Muhammad's Night Journey (*al-isra'*) and subsequent Ascension (*al-mi'raj*) to Heaven, see the article "al-Mi'raj" in *EI*.

52 Literally "prayer leader", a term that is often applied to any distinguished religious scholar.

53 This individual, who died in 406/1015 at Nishapur, was known primarily as a Shafi'i jurist and Ash'ari theologian. He was a teacher of al-Qushayri. For details, see the article "Ibn Furak" in *EI*.

54 On this Sufi master, who died in Nishapur in 373/983, see al-Sulami, *Tabaqat*, pp. 358–362 and the sources cited therein. His biography will be mentioned later (see p. 72).

postulated] that God is located in a certain direction.⁵⁵ However, when I arrived in Baghdad, this [idea] disappeared from my heart. I then wrote to my companions in Mecca, saying: 'I have become Muslim once again.'"⁵⁶

I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn al-Sulami say: I heard Abu 'Uthman al-Maghribi say, when he was asked about creatures: "[They are but] carcasses and ghosts who are governed by the rulings of Divine Power." Al-Wasiti said: "When the spirits and the bodies [of men] were brought forth by God, they came into being through Him and not through their own essences. Likewise, their thoughts and movements also appeared through God." He meant that the movements and the thoughts are but the ramifications⁵⁷ of the bodies and the spirits.//22 In saying so he explained that the acquisitions of the creatures are created by God Most High;⁵⁸ likewise, God Most High is the only one Who creates all essences and their accidents.⁵⁹

I heard Shaykh Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami – may God have mercy on him – say: I heard Muhammad b. 'Abdallah say: I heard Abu Ja'far al-Saydalani say: I heard Abu Sa'id al-Kharraz⁶⁰ say: "He who thinks that he can achieve his goal by exerting himself is only wearying himself in vain, while he who thinks that he can attain his goal without effort, is but a wishful thinker." Al-Wasiti said: "The stations [of the Sufi path] are but portions apportioned and attributes predetermined [by God's will]. Therefore, how can one strive to attain [something] through one's own actions and how can one seek to achieve [one's goal] through one's own effort?"⁶¹

Someone asked al-Wasiti whether unbelief [occurs] through God or belongs to Him. He answered: "Unbelief and faith, this world and the next, are all from God, to God, through God and belong to Him. That is, [they] originate from God, then [they] return to Him; [they] subsist and disappear through God and belong to Him as His domain and His creatures."

Al-Junayd said: Someone asked one of the scholars about the doctrine of oneness [of God]. He [the scholar] replied: "This is certitude." Then the inquirer asked: "Explain to me what it is?" [The scholar] answered: "It is when you know that the movement or immobility of creatures are the work of God alone – may

55 That is, that God has spatial characteristics and is seated on a physical throne in a concrete location. This teaching was attributed to some Islamic schools of thought, namely the Karramiyya and the Hanbalites.

56 That is, "I have converted to the true Islam."

57 *Furu'*; lit. "branches".

58 That is, they receive their acts and thoughts from God, whereupon they appropriate them.

59 This is a reference to the polemic between the Ash'arite theologians, whose position is upheld by the author, and their opponents, the Mu'tazilites, who treated the essences of things as being self-sufficient carriers of accidents. For details see Frank, *Beings and Their Attributes*, pp. 10–13 et passim.

60 On this controversial Sufi master of the Baghdad school, who was repeatedly exiled for his bold mystical ideas (he died around 286/899 or earlier), see *IM*, pp. 56–60.

61 That is, the success or failure of one's striving was predetermined by God from eternity.

He be great and exalted – and that He has no partners. If you have done this, you have already declared His oneness.”

I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn – may God have mercy on him – say: I heard ‘Abd al-Wahid b. ‘Ali say: I heard Muhammad b. Musa al-Wasiti say: I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn al-Jawhari say: I heard that Dhu ‘l-Nun al-Misri said that a man had come to him and said: “Pray to God on my behalf!//23 Since you are assisted in your knowledge of the Unseen⁶² by your realization of the doctrine of God’s oneness, God has answered many of your prayers in the past. However, a cry for help does not necessarily save a drowning man.”⁶³ Al-Wasiti said: “Pharaoh claimed lordship openly,⁶⁴ while the Mu‘tazilites do so covertly, when they say: ‘You do what you will.’”⁶⁵ Abu ‘l-Husayn al-Nuri said: “God’s oneness is when every thought points to God Most High, without being mixed with the thoughts that imply that God is similar [to His creatures].”

Shaykh Abu ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami – may God have mercy on him – said: I heard ‘Abd al-Wahid b. Bakr say: I heard that Hilal b. Ahmad said that someone asked Abu ‘Ali al-Rudhbari⁶⁶ about God’s oneness. He answered: “God’s oneness is to keep the heart upright by avoiding the teaching that strips [God of His attributes]⁶⁷ and by rejecting His similarity [with His creatures].⁶⁸ In one phrase, God’s oneness is asserted as follows: Whatever [human] imagination and thoughts might ascribe to God, He is the opposite of it, as stated by the Most High: “Like Him there is naught, He is the Hearing and the Seeing.”⁶⁹ Abu ‘l-Qasim al-Nasrabadhi⁷⁰ said: “Paradise subsists because He allows it to subsist. However, His thought of you, His mercy toward you and His love for you subsist as long as He Himself subsists. How different is that which subsists through His own subsistence from that which subsists because He allows it to subsist.” The words of Shaykh Abu ‘l-Qasim al-Nasrabadhi are the utmost goal of realization. The People of the Truth⁷¹ say that the attributes of the Essence of the Eternal – glory be to Him – subsist through His own subsistence. He drew attention to this issue and clarified that the Subsistent//24 subsists through His own subsistence, which is contrary to what is claimed by the opponents of the

62 That is, the world of the mystery of divine predestination that ordinary mortals cannot access.

63 That is, despite God’s predetermination of man’s fate, he is still responsible for his actions.

64 When he said [in the Qur’an 79:24]: “I am your Lord Most High!”

65 That is, they claim that they are the creators of their own actions.

66 A Sufi associated with al-Junayd’s circle. His biography is given later (see pp. 62–63), in the biographical section of the “Epistle”.

67 The doctrine of the “stripping” of God of His attributes (*ta’til*) was attributed to the Mu‘tazilites, who insisted that God’s attributes do not have independent existence and are but modes of His eternal essence.

68 The doctrine of the “likening” of God to His creatures (*tashbih*) was ascribed to a number of Islamic schools of thought, including the Karramiyya and some radical Hanbalites.

69 Q. 42:11.

70 A student of al-Shibli, who sympathized with al-Hallaj’s teaching. He died in 367/977.

71 That is, the accomplished Sufi masters.

People of the Truth. Muhammad b. al-Husayn said: I heard that al-Nasrabadhi said: "You vacillate between [God's] attributes of action and attributes of the essence."⁷² Both are His – may He be exalted – attributes in truth. When He throws you into confusion by placing you in the station of separation, He binds you with the attributes of His action. When He delivers you to the station of unity, He binds you with the attributes of His essence."

Abu ʿI-Qasim al-Nasrabadhi was the master of his age. I heard imam Abu ʿI-Ishaq al-Isfaraini⁷³ – may God have mercy on him – say: "When I arrived from Baghdad [to Nishapur]⁷⁴ I began to teach at the Friday mosque of Nishapur the doctrine of the human spirit, arguing that it was created. Abu ʿI-Qasim al-Nasrabadhi used to sit at some distance from us and to listen to my speech. After several days he approached us and said to Muhammad al-Farra': 'I testify that I was converted to Islam anew at the hands of this man!' And he pointed at me."⁷⁵

I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn al-Sulami say: I heard Abu ʿI-Husayn al-Farisi say: I heard Ibrahim b. Fatik say: I heard al-Junayd say: "When would He Who has neither a like nor an equal join the one who has both a like and an equal? Is this at all possible? This strange idea can only come true through the kindness of the [All-]Kind in which there can be no grasping, imagining or comprehension, but only the allusion [springing from] certitude and the realization [that comes with] the genuine faith."⁷⁶ Muhammad b. al-Husayn – may God have mercy on him – informed us: I heard ʿAbd al-Wahid b. Bakr say: Ahmad b. Muhammad b. ʿAli al-Bardaʿi told me: Tahir b. Ismaʿil al-Razi told me: someone asked Yahya b. Muʿadh:⁷⁷ "Tell me about God – may He be great and exalted!" He answered: "[Your God] is one God."⁷⁸ He was then asked: "How is He?"⁷⁹ [Yahya] answered: "[He is] the [All-]Powerful Ruler." He was then asked: "Where is He?" [Yahya] said: "[Thy Lord] is ever watching you."⁸⁰ The inquirer said to him: "I did not ask

72 According to Ashʿarite theologians, God's attributes are divided into two categories. The first are the attributes that pertain to the essence and are co-eternal with it – e.g., life, will, knowledge, power and so on. The second category comprises the attributes that describe God's acts in the created world, namely His sustenance of His creatures, His determining the death and birth of human beings, His wrath at human disobedience, and His contentment with mankind's good deeds. In theological works, the borderline between these two categories remained blurred and was disputed by various theological factions. See the article "Sifa" in *EI*.

73 On this famous theologian see article "al-Isfaraʿini" in *EI*.

74 A major cultural and religious center in Khurasan, Iran.

75 That is, he embraced the Ashʿarite doctrine of the created spirit.

76 That is, a cognitive union between man and God can only occur through a pure act of faith and certitude. It cannot be achieved through sense perception, intellectual process or the imagination.

77 A famous mystic from Nishapur, who distinguished himself as an eloquent preacher; he died in 258/872. See *IM*, pp. 92–94.

78 Q. 2:163.

79 That is, what is His mode of existence?

80 Q. 89:14.

you about that!" [Yahya] replied: "All other attributes belong to [His] creatures. As for His [genuine] attribute, it is as I have just told you."

Muhammad b. al-Husayn told us: He said I heard Abu Bakr al-Razi say: I heard Abu 'Ali al-Rudhbari say: "Whatever one imagines [about] God in his ignorance, the intellect shows [Him] to be different from that." // 25

Ibn Shahin asked al-Junayd about the meaning of the [word] "with". He responded: "'With' has two meanings: the 'with' of the Prophets, which is [God's] assistance and protection, as in the words of God: 'I shall be with you, hearing and seeing.'⁸¹ The 'with' of the commoners, which is [God's] knowledge and understanding, as in the words of God: 'Three men conspire not secretly with one another, but He is the fourth of them.'⁸²" To this Ibn Shahin responded: "People like you should be leading this community to God."

Someone asked Dhu 'l-Nun al-Misri about God's words: "The All-Compassionate sat Himself (*istawa*) upon the Throne."⁸³ He answered: "The All-Compassionate asserted His essence, while denying [His location] in a specific place. He exists through His own essence, whereas all other things exist through His command, as He wished [them to be]."⁸⁴ Someone asked al-Shibli about the words of God: "The All-Compassionate sat Himself on the Throne." He answered: "The All-Compassionate has existed forever, while the Throne is an originated thing. Therefore, the Throne was firmly installed (*istawa*) by the All-Compassionate."⁸⁵ Someone asked Ja'far b. Nusayr about the words of God: "The All-Compassionate sat Himself upon the Throne." He answered: "His knowledge of all things became equal,⁸⁶ in that no one thing is closer to Him than the other."

Ja'far al-Sadiq⁸⁷ said: "Whoever believes that God is [located] in something, [that originated] from something or [rests] upon something, has become // 26 a polytheist. In other words, had He been upon something, He would have been carried by it; had He been in something, He would have been confined [by it]; and had He been from something, He would have been an originated being." Ja'far al-Sadiq also said about God's words: "Then [He] drew near and hung suspended."⁸⁸

81 Q. 20:46.

82 Q. 58:7.

83 Q. 20:5.

84 Meaning God's creative command "Be!"

85 In some contexts, the verb *istawa* may mean either "to [firmly] install [oneself]" or "to raise". As in the next example, various meanings of this Arabic root are brought into play in the sayings of the Sufi masters.

86 A word play on the meaning of the Arabic verb *istawa*, which may mean either "to sit firmly" or "to be equal".

87 The sixth Shi'ī leader (*imam*), to whom many esoteric teachings are ascribed by later Sufi authors. See Böwering, *Mystical Vision*, pp. 140–142.

88 Q. 53:8. The identity of the being seen by Muhammad in this Qur'anic episode was disputed by Muslim scholars. While some early authorities believed that the Prophet saw God Himself, later exegesis almost uniformly insisted that he saw the angel of Revelation Gabriel; see Josef van Ess, "Vision and Ascension: *Surat al-Najm* and Its Relationship with Muhammad's *mi'raj*" in *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, vol. 1/1 (1999), pp. 47–62.

"Whoever imagines that God Himself drew near [to Muhammad] implies that there was a distance [between them]. In reality, 'drawing near' means only that each time [Muhammad] came closer to God, He removed him further from [conventional] knowledge, until there was neither 'nearness' nor 'distance'."

I found in the handwriting of [my] master Abu 'Ali [al-Daqqaq] that someone asked a Sufi where is God? He answered: "May God banish you [from good]! How can you seek the 'where' of witnessing [the divine Essence]?" Shaykh Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami told us: I heard Abu 'I-'Abbas al-Khashshab al-Baghdadi say: I heard Abu 'I-Qasim b. Musa say: I heard Muhammad b. Ahmad say: I heard al-Ansari say: I heard al-Kharraz⁸⁹ say: "The true essence of closeness [to God] is when the heart loses the perception of all things and the soul finds rest in God Most High."

I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn say: I heard Muhammad b. 'Ali al-Hafiz say: I heard Abu Mu'adh al-Qazwini say: I heard Abu 'Ali al-Dallal say: I heard Abu 'Abdallah b. Qahraman say: I heard Ibrahim al-Khawwas⁹⁰ say: "I came to a man who was possessed by Satan. I began to utter the call to prayer in his ear. Then Satan called me from the man's belly, saying: 'Let me kill him, for he says that the Qur'an is created!'"

Ibn 'Ata⁹¹ said: "When God Most High created the letters,⁹² He made them one of His mysteries. When He created Adam, He infused this mystery⁹³ into him, without however giving it to His angels. The letters⁹⁴ streamed from the tongue of Adam – upon him be peace – in different manners and in different languages, and God made them the [outward] forms." By saying this Ibn 'Ata' clearly affirmed that the letters are created.//27 Sahl b. 'Abdallah⁹⁵ said: "The letters are the tongue of action and not the tongue of the essence,⁹⁶ for they themselves are an action in that which is acted upon."⁹⁷ This too is a clear statement that the letters are created.

In his "Replies to the Questions of the Syrians" al-Junayd said: "Trust in God is an action of the heart; the oneness of God is a word of the heart." This is the teaching of the people of the fundamental principles [of religion], that is, speech

89 Abu Sa'ïd al-Kharraz. See note 60 on page 9.

90 A Sufi of al-Junayd's circle who died in 291/904. See al-Sulami, *Tabaqat*, pp. 220–222 and the biographical chapter of the "Epistle" on page 56.

91 Ahmad b. 'Ata' al-Rudhbari (d. 369/980).

92 *Huruf*, sing. *harf*. In Arabic this word denotes both letters and sounds. Here al-Qushayri refutes the thesis, upheld by some Hanbali scholars, that the letters or sounds of the Qur'an are uncreated.

93 That is, the knowledge of God.

94 Or the sounds, see note 92.

95 Sahl b. 'Abdallah al-Tustari (d. 283/896), an early Sufi theorist and exegete from Basra, who exerted a profound influence on the subsequent development of Sufi thought. See *IM*, "Index" and Böwering, *Mystical Vision*.

96 That is, they express God's actions, but not His hidden essence.

97 That is, they are created and take place in the created – that is, in language.

is the entity that resides in the heart; it comes from command and prohibition, from the [prophetic] tradition and search for this tradition. Al-Junayd also said in his "Replies to the Questions of the Syrians": "Only God possesses the knowledge of the Unseen."⁹⁸ He knows what was, what will be, what will not be and how this would be, were it to be." Al-Husayn b. al-Mansur [al-Hallaj] said: "He who has realized fully the truth of God's oneness, sheds [such questions as] 'why?' and 'how?'" Muhammad b. al-Husayn related to us: I heard that Mansur b. 'Abdallah said: I heard Ja'far b. Muhammad say: I heard al-Junayd say: "The most noble and exalted counsel is to allow your thought to roam in the arena of God's oneness."

Al-Wasiti said: "God has brought forth nothing more noble than the human spirit." He thus stated clearly that the spirit is created. The master and imam Zayn al-Islam Abu 'l-Qasim⁹⁹ said: "All these stories prove that the beliefs of Sufi masters agree with the teachings of the People of the Truth,¹⁰⁰ as far as the fundamentals of religion are concerned. We stop here in order to avoid going beyond the concision and brevity, which we have pledged to follow [in this work]."

Section [on divine oneness]

The master, the Adornment of Islam, Abu 'l-Qasim – may God make his glory eternal – said:

The following sections contain their beliefs concerning God's oneness, which we shall present in proper order. The dispersed and collected sayings of the masters of this path, as well as their books, teach about God's oneness as follows://28 God Most High – praise be to Him – is existent, eternal, one, wise, powerful, knowing, overpowering, compassionate, willing, hearing, glorious, exalted, speaking, seeing, proud, strong, living, one, everlasting, and everlasting refuge.¹⁰¹

He knows by [His] knowledge;¹⁰² he is powerful by [His] power; he wills by [His] will; he sees by [His] sight; He speaks by [His] speech; He lives by [His] life; He is everlasting by [His] everlastingness. He has two hands, which are His attributes and with which He creates what He wishes and gives it a specific form. He has a face. The attributes of His essence are unique to it. One must not say that they are He or that they are not He. They are [His] eternal attributes and [His] everlasting properties. He is unique in His essence. He is not similar to any originated thing, nor is any created being similar to Him. He is neither a body,

98 That is, the world of divine mystery that contains the true realities of all existing things and the knowledge of things to come until the end of time.

99 That is, al-Qushayri.

100 That is, the Sunnites who adhered to al-Ash'ari's theological doctrine.

101 *Al-Samad*; the exact meaning of this epithet of God mentioned in Q. 112:2 remains a matter of dispute. I follow A. J. Arberry's translation.

102 These statements are directed against the Mu'tazilite theologians who considered God's attributes to be mere modes of His being and who tended to allegorize the anthropomorphic features ascribed to God in the Muslim scripture.

nor a substance, nor an accident. His attributes are not accidents and He can be neither fancied by the imagination nor represented by the intellect. He has neither direction nor place and He is not subject to the flow of time or age. His properties neither increase nor decrease. He has neither shape nor corpus and cannot be limited by an end or a limit. No originated thing can dwell in Him, and no cause can move Him to action. He is subject to neither color nor coming-to-be and is in no need of help or assistance. No essence endowed with power can escape His power nor can any creature disengage itself from//29 His command. No known thing eludes His knowledge and no one can reprimand Him for what and how He does what He does.

About Him one ought not ask “where?”, “in what way?” or “how?”. His existence has no beginning, therefore, one should not ask: “When did He come to be?” His duration has no end and one cannot say [about Him]: “[His] age and time have ended.” One cannot say why He did what He did, since His actions have no cause. Nor can one say: “What is He?”, for He belongs to no category [of beings] and therefore cannot have any special mark setting Him aside from the other [similar beings]. He will be seen [on the Judgement Day], but not by positioning Himself in front of the viewers, while He will see others without applying [His] eyesight. He fashions [creatures] without touching them directly or handling.

His are the most beautiful names¹⁰³ and the most exalted attributes. He “does whatsoever he desires”,¹⁰⁴ and [all] creatures obey His verdict. Nothing can happen in His realm unless He so willed, and no event can take place in His kingdom, unless He has predetermined it. When he knows that something should happen, He wills it and it happens indeed. And when He knows that something should not happen, although [in principle] possible, He wills that it should not happen. He is the creator of men’s deeds, both good and bad; He is the originator of all the entities and events in this world, rare or numerous. He sends [His] messengers to mankind, although He is under no obligation to do so.

It is He Who causes men to worship Him by communicating with them through the prophets in such a way that no one can either censure or oppose [Him]. It is He Who helped our prophet Muhammad – may God’s prayer and blessing be upon him – by evidential miracles and resplendent signs, depriving [his deniers] of an excuse [not to embrace his message] and making clear through him [the distinction between] certain knowledge¹⁰⁵ and denial. It is He Who, at first, protected the sanctity of Islam after the death of His Prophet – may God’s prayer and blessing be upon him – through the Rightly-Guided Caliphs,¹⁰⁶ then proceeded to protect and aid the truth by revealing the irrefutable proofs of the religion through lips of His friends.¹⁰⁷ He has since been safeguarding His

103 Q. 7:180 and 17:110.

104 Q. 2:253.

105 That is, true faith.

106 That is, the first four successors of the Prophet.

107 Meaning probably both Sufi masters and religious scholars (*‘ulama’*).

monotheistic Community from agreeing upon error.¹⁰⁸ He has cut the root of falsehood by presenting irrefutable evidence and fulfilled His promise to support His religion, in accordance with His words: "That he [the prophet Muhammad] may uplift it above every religion, though the unbelievers be averse."¹⁰⁹

These are the passages that present in brief the principles of the Sufi masters. May God grant us success!//30

108 According to a famous *hadith* of the Prophet, his community will never agree on an error.

109 Q. 9:33.

Chapter 1

ON THE MASTERS OF THIS PATH AND THEIR DEEDS AND SAYINGS THAT SHOW HOW THEY UPHOLD THE DIVINE LAW¹

Know – may God Most High have mercy on you – that after the death of the Messenger of God – may God bless and greet him – the best Muslims of the epoch chose to be named by a word that pointed to their companionship with the Messenger of God, for no virtue was superior to it. So, they were called “Companions [of the Prophet]” (*sahaba*). When the people of the next generation succeeded them, those who kept company with the Companions came to be named “Successors” (*tabiʿun*). The Successors considered this name to be the noblest of all characteristics. As for those who came after them, they were called “the Successors of the Successors” (*tabiʿu al-tabiʿin*). After that the people became more and more diverse, and their ranks became distinct from one another. The elect people, who had strong attachment to the affairs of faith, came to be known as “World-renouncers”² and “Worshippers”.³ Then there appeared innovations [in religion] and strife among various factions. [Members] of each group claimed that the [true] World-renouncers were among them. As for those elect adherents of the Prophet’s custom⁴ who kept every breath they made with God⁵ and who protected their hearts from the onslaughts of forgetfulness, they were distinguished from the rest by the name “Sufism”.⁶ This name became widely applied to the greatest among them before the second century of the Hijra.⁷

In this chapter we shall mention the names of the masters of this [Sufi] path from the first generation up until those who live today. We shall also mention some of their biographies and sayings in order to demonstrate their principles and good manners, if God Most High so wills.

1 *Al-shariʿa*; in what follows this Arabic term will either be translated as the “Divine Law” or left untranslated.

2 *Zuhhad*, sing. *zahid*; in what follows this term may occasionally also be translated as “ascetics”.

3 *ʿUbbad*, sing. *ʿabid*.

4 *Sunna*, the exemplary behavior of the Prophet and his closest Companions to be emulated by every righteous Muslim. Occasionally this term is left untranslated.

5 That is, those who examine their actions carefully in order to determine their compliance with God’s will as expressed in the shariʿa.

6 The Western equivalent of the Arabic word *tasammuf*.

7 The prophet Muhammad’s emigration from Mecca to Medina in 622, which became the first year of the Muslim sacred calendar.

Abu Ishaq Ibrahim b. Adham b. Mansur⁸

He – may God be pleased with him – came from the region of Balkh.⁹ He was a son of a king. Once he set out on a hunting trip. As he stirred up a fox or a rabbit and set out to chase it, he heard a voice//31: “O Ibrahim, were you created for this or commanded to do this?” Then he heard the voice again, from behind the saddle bow, saying: “By God, you were not created for this and you were not commanded to do this!” He dismounted from his horse. He then came across a shepherd of his father’s, took his woolen shirt and put it on and gave away all his belongings and the horse to the shepherd. Then he began wandering in the desert until he arrived in Mecca, where he attached himself to Sufyan al-Thawri¹⁰ and al-Fudayl b. ‘Iyad.¹¹ After that he journeyed to Syria and died there. He lived by the toil of his hands, such as harvesting, guarding the orchards and so on. [Once] in the desert he met a man who taught him the greatest name of God.¹² After [the man] left, he called upon God by this name and saw al-Khadir,¹³ who told him: “My brother [the prophet] David has just taught you God’s greatest name.” This story was related to us by Shaykh Abu ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami – may God have mercy on him. He said: Muhammad b. al-Husayn Ibn al-Khashshab said: Abu al-Hasan ‘Ali b. Muhammad al-Misri said: Abu Sa‘id al-Kharraz said: Ibrahim b. Bashshar said: “I was accompanying Ibrahim b. Adham. Once I told him: ‘Tell me about the beginning of your affair.’ He then recounted this [story] to me.”//32

Ibrahim b. Adham was particularly famous for his pious scrupulosity. It is told that he said: “Watch carefully what you eat,¹⁴ and then there will be no harm for you in not staying awake during the night or fasting during the day!” His most common prayer was: “O God, remove me from the disgrace of disobedience to You to the glory of obedience to You!” Someone said to Ibrahim b. Adham: “Meat has become expensive!” He answered: “Make it cheaper”, that is, “Do not buy it.” He then recited the following verse:

When something becomes too expensive for me, I abandon it.

Therefore the more expensive it becomes, the cheaper it is [for me].

8 On him, see *IM*, pp. 18–20.

9 Presently in northern Afghanistan.

10 On this renowned early scholar and jurist see the article “Sufyan al-Thawri” in *EI*. He died in 161/777.

11 A famous early ascetic, whom a pious legend portrays as a repented highway robber. See his biography on pages 20–21 and *IM*, pp. 23–24.

12 According to the Islamic tradition, God has ninety-nine “most beautiful names”. His hundredth name is hidden from the common people, but may sometimes be revealed by God to His elect friends (*awliya'*). For details see Daniel Gimaret, *Les noms divins en Islam*.

13 On this legendary person, who is usually identified with the unnamed companion of Moses in Q. 59:81, see the article “al-Khadir” in *EI*. Although some Muslim scholars consider him to be a prophet, he is more commonly seen as a friend of God and paragon of the Sufi gnostic.

14 That is, eat only the food that is properly obtained.

Muhammad b. al-Husayn – may God have mercy on him – said: I heard Mansur b. 'Abdallah say: I heard Muhammad b. Hamid say: I heard Ahmad b. Khadrawayh (Khidrūya) say: Ibrahim b. Adham said to a man who was performing a circumambulation [of the Ka'ba]: “Know that you will not attain the rank of the righteous until you have climbed six mountain peaks. First, you must shut the door of pleasant life and open the door of hardship. Second, you must shut the door of [self-]glorification and open the door of humility. Third, you must shut the door of quiet and open the door of self-exertion. Fourth, you must shut the door of sleep and open the door of vigil. Fifth, you must shut the door of wealth and open the door of poverty. Sixth, you must shut the door of hope and open the door of readiness for death.”

[Once] Ibrahim b. Adham was guarding a vineyard. A soldier who was passing by told him: “Give me some of those grapes!” Ibrahim b. Adham replied: “The owner forbade me [to do this].” The soldier began to lash him with his whip. Ibrahim b. Adham lowered his head and said: “Beat this head, for it disobeys God often!” On hearing this the soldier was unable to continue the beating and departed.

Sahl b. Ibrahim said: “I was a companion of Ibrahim b. Adham. When I became ill, he spent all his wages on me. When I felt craving for some food, he sold his donkey and spent all of its cost on me. When I began to recover, I asked him: ‘Ibrahim, where is the donkey?’ He answered: ‘I sold it.’ I told him: ‘What shall I be riding on?’ He said: ‘On my neck, my brother!’ And he carried me for three way-stations.”//33

Abu 'l-Fayd Dhu 'l-Nun al-Misri¹⁵

His name is Thawban b. Ibrahim. He was also called Abu 'l-Fayd b. Ibrahim. His father was a Nubian.¹⁶ He [Dhu 'l-Nun] died in 245.¹⁷ He excelled in this affair¹⁸ and was unique in his age in respect of knowledge, pious scrupulosity, [spiritual] state, and good manners. Some people denounced him [as a heretic] to [the caliph] al-Mutawakkil¹⁹ and the latter commanded that he be brought before him from Egypt. When [Dhu 'l-Nun] appeared before him and admonished him, al-Mutawakkil began to cry and [ordered] that he be taken back to Egypt with honor. [Since then] each time someone mentioned pious people to al-Mutawakkil, he would cry and say: “Whenever one speaks of the pious, let them first mention Dhu 'l-Nun!” He was a slim man with a light skin, whose beard was not white.

I heard Ahmad b. Muhammad say: I heard Sa'īd b. 'Uthman say: I heard that Dhu 'l-Nun said: “Everything hinges on four things: the love of the Glorious

15 On this renowned early mystic, see *IM*, pp. 39–42.

16 That is, he came from Nubia, Upper Egypt.

17 That is in 859 or 860 C.E.

18 That is, in Sufism.

19 A caliph of the 'Abbasid dynasty from 232/847 to 247/861.

One, the hatred of the insufficient,²⁰ the observance of the revealed²¹ and the fear of changing from one state to another.”²²

I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn – may God have mercy on him – say: I heard Saʿid b. Ahmad b. Jaʿfar say: I heard Muhammad b. Ahmad b. Sahl say: I heard Saʿid b. ʿUthman say: I heard Dhu ʿl-Nun say: “One of the signs of the lover of God is his following in the footsteps of God’s beloved²³ – may God bless and greet him – in his character traits, his deeds, his precepts and his customs.”//34

Someone asked Dhu ʿl-Nun about ignoble people. He answered: “Those who neither know the way to God, nor try to know it.” I heard Abu ʿAbd al-Rahman al-Sulami – may God have mercy on him – say: I heard Abu Bakr b. Muhammad b. ʿAbdallah b. Shadhan say: I heard Yusuf b. al-Husayn say: “One day I was at Dhu ʿl-Nun’s teaching session. There came to him Salim al-Maghribi and asked him: ‘Abu ʿl-Fayd, what was the cause of your repentance?’²⁴ He answered: ‘It was something really wonderful that you cannot imitate.’ [Salim] said: ‘For the sake of God, tell me about it!’ Dhu ʿl-Nun said: ‘I wanted to go from [old] Cairo²⁵ to a village in the countryside. I fell asleep in the desert, and when I opened my eyes I saw a small blind fledgling that fell from its nest onto the ground. [Suddenly] the earth cleft and there appeared [from the crack] two food bowls, one silver and the other gold. In one there were sesame seeds, in the other water. The fledgling ate from one bowl and drank from the other. I cried out: “This is enough for me. I have repented!” And I was waiting at God’s door until He [agreed to] receive me.’”

I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn say: I heard ʿAli b. al-Hafiz say: I heard Ibn Rashiḡ say: I heard Abu Dujana say: I heard Dhu ʿl-Nun say: “Wisdom does not live in a stomach filled with food.” Someone asked Dhu ʿl-Nun about repentance. He answered: “The common people repent from [their] sins, whereas [God’s] elect people repent from neglectfulness.”//35

Abu ʿAli al-Fudayl b. ʿIyad²⁶

He came from Khurasan, from the region of Marw.²⁷ It is said that he was born in Samarkand and grew up at Abiward. He died in Mecca in the month of Muharram, in the year 187.²⁸ I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn say: Abu Bakr

20 According to some commentators, the insufficient here refers to “this life and its attractions”.

21 That is, the Divine Law.

22 According to commentators, this means change from a virtuous state to a less perfect one.

23 That is, the prophet Muhammad.

24 The Sufi path usually begins with repentance.

25 At that time the city of Cairo did not yet exist. It was founded in 359/970 by the Fatimid ruler al-Muʿizz. In Dhu ʿl-Nun’s time the capital of Egypt was located at Fustat (old Cairo).

26 A famous early ascetic. See *IM*, pp. 23–24.

27 In the present day Republic of Turkmenistan.

28 That is, in 803 C.E.

Muhammad b. Ja'far told us: al-Hasan b. 'Abdallah al-'Askari told us: the son of Abu Zur'a's brother told us: Muhammad b. Ishaq b. Rahuya (Rahawayh) told us: Abu 'Ammar told us on the authority of al-Fudayl b. Musa that al-Fudayl [b. 'Iyad] was a dangerous young lad, who robbed caravans between Abiward and Sarakhs.²⁹ The reason for his repentance was the following. He fell in love with a slave girl and, as he was climbing up the wall in order to meet her, he heard a Qur'an reader reciting "Isn't it time that the hearts of those who believe should be humbled to the remembrance of God?"³⁰ And he said: "O my Lord, it is indeed the time!" and turned back. The night brought him to some ruins. There was a group of people there. Some of them said: "Let's go." Others said: "Let's wait until dawn, for al-Fudayl is on the road and may rob us." [On hearing this] al-Fudayl repented and took them under his protection. [Later] he settled down in the Holy City³¹ and died there.

Al-Fudayl said: "When God loves [His] servant, he bestows on him much grief, and when He hates [His] servant, He grants him abundance in this world." Ibn al-Mubarak³² said: "When al-Fudayl died, sorrow departed [with him]." // 36 Al-Fudayl said: "If this world with all that is in it were offered to me and I were not held responsible for enjoying it, I would still turn away from it in disgust, as you would turn away from a decaying corpse, while passing it by, in order not to smear your clothes with it." Al-Fudayl said: "I would rather swear that I am a hypocrite than that I am not a hypocrite." Al-Fudayl said: "Not to act for the sake of others is hypocrisy, while to act for the sake of others is polytheism."

Abu 'Ali al-Razi said: "I accompanied al-Fudayl for thirty years without ever seeing him laughing or smiling, except for the day when his son 'Ali died. I asked him about this. He said: 'If God loves something, I love it too.'" Al-Fudayl said: "Whenever I disobey God, I know this from the behavior of my donkey and my servant."³³

Abu Mahfuz Ma'ruf b. Fayruz al-Karkhi³⁴

He was a great master whose prayers were answered [by God] and whose grave was [a source] of healing. The inhabitants of Baghdad say that the grave of Ma'ruf is a proven panacea. // 37 He was a client of [the imam] 'Ali b. Musa al-Rida³⁵ and died in the year 200, though some say that he died in 201.³⁶ He was

29 Cities in Khurasan, Iran.

30 Q. 57:16.

31 That is, Mecca.

32 A famous warrior ascetic from the Arab-Byzantine frontier. He died in 181/797; see *IM*, pp. 21–22.

33 That is, God protects him by sending him a warning through them.

34 An early ascetic of Baghdad who died in 200/815. See *IM*, pp. 48–49.

35 The eighth imam of the Shi'ites who died in 203/818.

36 816 C.E.

a teacher of Sari al-Saqati.³⁷ One day he told [al-Saqati]: “When you need something from God, call upon Him by my name!”

I heard my teacher Abu ‘Ali al-Daqqaq – may God have mercy on him – say that Ma‘ruf’s parents were Christians. While still a child, they entrusted Ma‘ruf to their teacher, who used to tell him: “He [God] is the third of the three”, to which Ma‘ruf always replied: “No, He is one.” One day the teacher gave him a severe beating and Ma‘ruf ran away. His parents said: “Should he return to us with any religion he wants, we would then join him in it!” Later, he embraced Islam at the hands of [the imam] ‘Ali b. Musa al-Rida³⁸ and returned to his house. He knocked on the door. [His parents] asked: “Who is at the door?” He answered: “Ma‘ruf.” They asked him: “What is your religion?” He said: “[This is] a monotheistic (*hanafi*) religion.” So his parents became Muslims too.

I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn say: I heard Abu Bakr al-Razi say: I heard Abu Bakr al-Harbi say: I heard Sari al-Saqati³⁹ say: “I saw in a dream that Ma‘ruf was standing under [God’s] throne. God – may He be great and exalted – said to His angels: ‘Who is this?’ They answered: ‘You know best, O Lord!’ God then said: “This is Ma‘ruf al-Karkhi. He is drunk with the love of Me and will regain his full consciousness only after meeting Me!”

Ma‘ruf said: “One of the companions of Dawud al-Ta‘i⁴⁰ told me: ‘Beware of abandoning [good] works, for they bring you near to your Lord’s satisfaction.’” I asked: “What are these works?” Dawud al-Ta‘i answered: “Obedience to your Lord, rendering service to the Muslims and advising them.” I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn say: I heard Muhammad b. ‘Abdallah al-Razi say//38: I heard ‘Ali b. Muhammad al-Dallal say: I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn say: I heard that my father said: “I saw Ma‘ruf in a dream after his death. I asked him: ‘What did God do to you?’ He answered: ‘He pardoned me.’ I asked him: ‘Was this due to your self-renunciation and fear of God?’ He said: ‘No, this was due to my following the admonition of Ibn al-Sammak⁴¹: to practice poverty and to love the poor.’”⁴² Regarding the admonition of Ibn al-Sammak, Ma‘ruf recounted the following: “Once I came to Kufa.⁴³ There I met a man by the name Ibn al-Sammak, who was preaching to the people. He said in his speech: ‘He who turns away from God completely, God too will turn away from him once and for all. And he who will turn to God with his heart, God will turn to him with His mercy and make the faces of all creatures turn toward him. As for him who at one time turns to God and at another forgets Him, God will still show mercy to him at some point in time.’ His words sank deeply into my heart. I turned to God

37 A famous Baghdad Sufi and uncle of al-Junayd, who died in 253/867. See *IM*, pp. 50–52.

38 The eighth imam (spiritual leader) of the Twelver Shi‘ites; died in 203/818.

39 For him, see the next entry.

40 On him see pages 29–30.

41 A popular ascetic and preacher of Kufa who died around 183/800.

42 That is, ascetics and Sufis.

43 A city in Iraq that was famous as a major center of Islamic learning.

– may He be exalted – and abandoned everything I had been doing, except my service of my master ‘Ali b. Musa al-Rida.⁴⁴ I mentioned these words⁴⁵ to my master. He responded: ‘This admonition is sufficient for you, should you decide to preach on your own.’” This story was related to me by Muhammad b. al-Husayn, who said: I heard ‘Abd al-Rahim b. ‘Ali al-Hafiz say in Baghdad: I heard Muhammad b. ‘Umar b. al-Fadl say: I heard ‘Ali b. ‘Isa say: I heard Sari al-Saqati say: I heard how Ma‘ruf recounted this [story].

On his death bed Ma‘ruf was asked for a final piece of advice. He said: ‘When I die, give away my shirt as alms, for I want to leave this world naked as I came into it.’”

One day Ma‘ruf was passing by a water-carrier, who was saying: “May God have mercy on him who drinks.” Although Ma‘ruf was fasting at that time, he came up to the water-carrier and drank.” Someone asked him: “Weren’t you fasting?” He answered: “Yes, but I hoped to obtain His blessing.”//39

Abu 'l-Hasan [al-]Sari b. al-Mughallis al-Saqati⁴⁶

He was al-Junayd’s maternal uncle and teacher and a disciple of Ma‘ruf al-Karkhi. He was unique in his age as regards pious scrupulosity and the knowledge of the Prophet’s custom and divine oneness. I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn say: I heard ‘Abdallah b. ‘Ali al-Tusi say: I heard Abu ‘Amr b. ‘Alwan say: I heard Abu 'l-‘Abbas b. Masruq⁴⁷ say: “I heard that Sari al-Saqati was plying his trade at the bazaar, while he was a companion of Ma‘ruf al-Karkhi. Once Ma‘ruf came to him with an orphan boy. He said [to Sari]: ‘Clothe this orphan!’ Sari said: ‘I clothed him.’ Ma‘ruf rejoiced at this and said: ‘May God make this world hateful to you and relieve you of your trade!’ So I left my shop and [since that time] there is nothing more hateful to me than this world and all that I have now comes to me through Ma‘ruf’s blessings.” I heard Shaykh Abu ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami – may God have mercy on him – say: I heard Abu Bakr al-Razi say: I heard Abu ‘Umar al-Anmati say: I heard al-Junayd say: “I have never seen anyone more devoted to God than al-Sari. I visited him for ninety-eight years without ever seeing him lying down, except when he was on his death bed.” It is told that al-Sari said: “Sufism is a name for three things://40 [The Sufi] is the one in whom the light of knowledge does not extinguish the light of scrupulosity. In his inner self he does not speak of any knowledge contradicting the external meaning of the [Holy] Book or the Prophet’s custom. [His] miracles do not cause him to violate the sacredness of the divine prohibitions.”

44 See note 35.

45 That is, those of Ibn al-Sammak.

46 See *IM*, pp. 50–52.

47 On him see page 54.

Al-Sari died in the year 257.⁴⁸ I heard that the master Abu 'Ali al-Daqqaq recounted the following on the authority of al-Junayd – may God have mercy on him. [Al-Junayd] said: “Once al-Sari asked me about the love of God. I answered: ‘Some people say that it is compliance [with God’s commands]; others that it is giving preference to others over yourself; still others says that it is so and so ...’ Al-Sari pinched the skin of his elbow and tried to stretch it, but it would not stretch. He then said: ‘By God’s greatness, if I say that this skin has dried up on the bone due to [my] love of Him, that would be the truth.’ He then swooned and his face became round as if it were a radiant moon, though al-Sari was of a pale complexion.”

It is related that al-Sari once said: “For thirty years I have regretted that I once said: ‘Praise be to God!’ Someone asked him how this could be. He answered: ‘Once there was a fire in Baghdad. I came across a man who told me that my shop had survived the fire, to which I said: ‘Praise be to God!’ For thirty years now I have had regrets about having said this, because I wished for myself a better lot than that which had befallen my fellow Muslims.” ‘Abdallah b. Yusuf told me: I heard Abu Bakr al-Razi say: I heard Abu Bakr al-Harbi say: I heard al-Sari say that.

It is related about al-Sari that he said: “I am squinting at my nose so many times during the day, because I am afraid that [my face] has become black – that is, that God has blackened my complexion [as a punishment] for what I have done.”

I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn – may God have mercy on him – say: I heard Muhammad b. al-Hasan b. al-Khashshab say: I heard Ja'far b. Muhammad b. Nusayr⁴⁹ say: I heard al-Junayd say: I heard al-Sari say: “I know the shortest path leading to Paradise.”//41 I asked him what it was. He answered: “Don’t take anything from anyone, don’t seek anything from anyone and don’t possess anything which you would give to anyone.”

I heard ‘Abdallah b. Yusuf al-Isbahani say: I heard Abu Nasr al-Sarraj al-Tusi⁵⁰ say: I heard Ja'far b. Muhammad b. Nusayr⁵¹ say: I heard al-Junayd b. Muhammad say: I heard al-Sari say: “I wish I could die in a land other than Baghdad.” Someone asked him why. He answered: “I am afraid that my grave would not accept me and I would thus be disgraced.” I heard ‘Abdallah b. Yusuf al-Isfahani say: I heard Abu 'l-Hasan b. ‘Abdallah al-Fuwati al-Tarsusi say: I heard al-Junayd say: I heard al-Sari say: “O my God, punish me with whatever as You wish, but do not punish me with the humiliation of the veil!”⁵²

48 His date of death varies from one source to another, but most authors agree that he died between 251/865 and 258/871.

49 That is, Ja'far al-Khuldi (348/959), a famous Sufi biographer of the Baghdad school.

50 A famous Sufi writer, who died in 378/988. See *IM*, pp. 118–120.

51 See note 49.

52 According to a popular Sufi *hadith*, God’s face is hidden behind numerous veils, which He removes one by one as His mystical lover draws ever near Him. See Chittick, *Self-Disclosure of God*, pp. 104–163 and “Index” under “veil”.

I heard 'Abdallah b. Yusuf al-Isfahani say: I heard Abu Bakr al-Razi say: I heard al-Jurayri say: I heard al-Junayd say: "Once I came to visit al-Sari al-Saqati and found him crying. I asked him: 'What made you cry?' He answered: 'Yesterday, my daughter came to me and said: This is a hot night, therefore I will hang this [water-cooling] pitcher here. Then I closed my eyes and fell asleep. In my dream I saw a most beautiful slave girl who had descended from heaven. I asked to whom she belonged. She said that she would belong to whoever did not drink the water that was cooled in a pitcher. I then grabbed the pitcher and smashed it to pieces against the ground.'"

Al-Junayd said: "I [indeed] saw pieces of broken earthenware that he never picked up or touched, until it was completely covered with dust."//42

Abu Nasr Bishr b. al-Harith al-Hafi (the Barefoot)⁵³

He came from [the city of] Marw.⁵⁴ He lived in Baghdad, where he died. He was a son of 'Ali b. Khashram's sister. He died in the year 227 [842]. He was a man of great stature. The following [episode] became the reason for his repentance.⁵⁵ He found on the road a small piece of paper upon which was written the name of God – may He be great and exalted. This sheet was trampled upon [by passers-by]. He picked it up, purchased a *dirham*-worth of perfume, sprinkled the sheet with it and put it in the crack of a wall. Then he saw in a dream as if someone told him: "O Bishr, you perfumed My name and I will perfume yours in this world and the next one!"

I heard Master Abu 'Ali al-Daqqaq – may God have mercy on him – say: "Bishr was passing by a group of people who said: 'This man does not sleep all night and he breaks his fast only once in three days.' On hearing this, Bishr began to cry. When someone asked him why, he said: 'Verily, I do not remember ever saying that I keep vigil during the whole night. Nor have I said that after fasting during the day I do not break my fast at night. However, God, in His kindness and graciousness, has revealed to the hearts [of the people] more than His servant actually does – may He be blessed!' He then proceeded to describe the beginning of the affair,⁵⁶ as we have just mentioned."

I heard Shaykh Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami say: I heard Muhammad b. 'Abdallah al-Razi say: I heard 'Abd al-Rahman b. Abi Hatim say: I came to know that Bishr b. al-Harith al-Hafi said: "In a dream I saw the Prophet – may peace and blessings be upon him! He asked me: 'Bishr, do you know why God has raised you above your contemporaries?' I said: 'I do not, Messenger of God.' He said: '[It is due to] your following of my custom, your service to the righteous, your admonition of your brothers [in faith] and your love of my Companions

53 On him see *IM*, pp. 49–50.

54 An ancient city in present-day Turkmenistan.

55 The journey on the mystical path usually begins with repentance.

56 That is, his conversion to Sufism.

and my family. This is what brought you to the stations of the most pious men!”

I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn – may God have mercy on him – say: I heard Muhammad b. ‘Abdallah al-Razi say: I heard Bilal al-Khawwas say: “As I was traveling across the desert of the Israelites,⁵⁷ I suddenly saw a man walking by my side. At first I was surprised, but then I came to realize that that was al-Khadir⁵⁸ – peace be upon him. I asked him: ‘By God, who are you?’ He answered: ‘Your brother al-Khadir!’ I told him that I had a question for him. He said: ‘Ask!’ ‘What do you say about al-Shafi‘i⁵⁹ – may God have mercy on him?’ He answered: ‘He was a [spiritual] peg.’⁶⁰ I then asked him: ‘What would you say about Ahmad b. Hanbal?’⁶¹ He answered: ‘He was a veracious man.’⁶² ‘And what would you say about Bishr al-Hafi?’ He answered: ‘After him there was no one like him.’⁶³ I asked him: ‘Owing to what was I able to see you?’ He answered: ‘Owing to your pious behavior toward your mother.’”

I heard Master Abu ‘Ali al-Daqqaq – may God have mercy on him – say: “Once Bishr al-Hafi came to Mu‘afa b. ‘Imran⁶⁴ and knocked on his door. He was asked who it was and he said: ‘Bishr al-Hafi (the Barefoot).’ Then a young girl told him from behind the door: ‘If you were to buy yourself a pair of sandals for a couple of *daniqs*,⁶⁵ you would lose your name.’” Muhammad b. ‘Abdallah al-Shirazi reported this story to me. He said: ‘Abd al-‘Aziz b. al-Fadl told me: Muhammad b. Sa‘id told me: Muhammad b. ‘Abdallah told me: He said that he heard ‘Abdallah al-Maghazili say that he heard Bishr al-Hafi mention this story. I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn say: I heard Abu ‘l-Husayn al-Hajjaji//44 say: I heard al-Mahamili say: I heard al-Hasan al-Masuhi say: I heard Bishr al-Harith telling this story.

I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn say: I heard Abu ‘l-Fadl al-‘Attar say: I heard Ahmad b. ‘Ali al-Dimashqi say: Abu ‘Abdallah b. al-Jalla⁶⁶ told me: “I saw

57 Probably the Sinai desert.

58 On this legendary personage (usually identified with Moses’ mysterious companion in Q. 18:59–81), whom the Sufis consider their holy patron, see the article “al-Khadir” in *EI*.

59 A great jurist and the founder of one of the four Sunni legal schools. See the article “al-Shafi‘i” in *EI*.

60 That is, a member of the invisible hierarchy of the saints who are the real rulers of the universe. The peg (*watad*) is a high, although not the highest, rank in this saintly hierarchy. His name indicates that his function is to keep the universe stable.

61 Another great Sunni scholar, the founder of the Hanbali school of jurisprudence. On him see the article “Ahmad b. Hanbal” in *EI*.

62 *Siddiq* (lit. “faithful”, “truthful” or “just”); in the Sufi tradition this Qur’anic term (Q. 4:71) denotes an advanced rank of sainthood. Cf. Al-Sarraj, *Al-luma‘*, p. 72.

63 That is, no one better than him.

64 Al-Mu‘afa b. ‘Imran b. Nufayl al-Azdi al-Mawsili (d. between 184 and 186/800–802), a famous ascetic of Baghdad.

65 Also *danaq*, a small copper coin worth one-sixth of a *dirham*.

66 On him see page 47.

Dhu 'l-Nun,⁶⁷ who was famous for his clear expression.⁶⁸ I saw Sahl,⁶⁹ who was famous for his allegorical allusion. I saw Bishr al-Hafi, who was famous for his scrupulousness.⁷⁰ Someone asked him: 'To whom of them are you more inclined?' He said: 'To my teacher, Bishr b. al-Harith.''' It is said that for many years he craved beans, but he [never permitted himself to] eat them. Someone saw him in a dream after he⁷¹ had died and asked him how God treated him. He [Bishr] answered: "[God] pardoned me and said: 'Eat, O you who have not eaten! Drink, O you who have not drunk!'"

Shaykh Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami – may God have mercy on him – told me: 'Ubaydallah b. 'Uthman b. Yahya told me: Abu 'Amr b. al-Sammak told me: Muhammad b. al-'Abbas told me: Abu Bakr b. Bint Mu'awiyya said: I heard that Abu Bakr b. 'Affan said: I heard Bishr b. al-Harith say: "For forty years I was craving roasted meat, yet I never could afford its price due to the lack of untainted money."⁷²

Someone asked Bishr what he was eating his bread with. He answered: "I think of salvation⁷³ and make it my seasoning."⁷⁴ I was told about this by Muhammad b. al-Husayn – may God have mercy on him. He said 'Ubaydallah b. 'Uthman told: Abu 'Amr b. al-Sammak related to us: 'Umar b. Sa'id said: Ibn Abi al-Dunya related to us that a certain man said that this famous story [is indeed] about Bishr.

Bishr said: "That which is permitted tolerates no wastefulness."⁷⁵

Someone saw Bishr in a dream and asked him: "What did God do to you?" He answered: "He pardoned me and gave me a half of Paradise, then said: 'Bishr, even if you were to perform your [ritual] prostrations before Me on the burning coals, you would still be unable to repay Me for the [exalted] place that I allotted you in the hearts of My servants.'"

Bishr said: "A man who loves to be known to people will not taste the sweetness of the Hereafter."//45

Abu 'Abdallah al-Harith al-Muhasibi⁷⁶

He was unique in his age in regard to [religious] knowledge, pious scrupulosity, acts of devotion and mystical states. He came from Basra and died in Baghdad in

67 A famous Sufi of Egypt; on him see pages 19–20.

68 *Ibara*, a clear, unambiguous expression or speech – as opposed to *ishara*, a mystical allusion, which is often ambiguous in order to conceal its true meaning from the uninitiated.

69 Sahl al-Tustari (d. 283/896), a famous Sufi of Basra; on him see Böwering, *Mystical Vision*, passim.

70 *Wara'*; a Sufi term denoting scrupulous discernment between what is permitted (under the shari'a law) and what is prohibited.

71 Meaning Bishr.

72 That is, the money that he would consider to have been earned in a proper way.

73 Literally, "health" (*al-ʿafiya*), but here it probably means "health in the Hereafter".

74 That is, spices that enhance the taste of food.

75 That is, the permitted is rare and hard to come by.

76 On him see *IM*, pp. 43–48.

243.⁷⁷ It is said that he inherited from his father the sum of 70 thousand *dirhams*, but he did not take anything from it. It is said that this was because his father was an adherent of [the doctrine of] human free will⁷⁸ and he considered that it would be unscrupulous to take anything from his legacy. A sound report from the Prophet – may God bless and greet him – says: “People of two different religions do not inherit anything from one another.”

I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn say: al-Husayn b. Yahya said: Ja‘far b. Muhammad b. Nusayr [al-Khuldi] said: I heard Muhammad b. Masruq say: “When al-Harith b. Asad al-Muhasibi died, he had not a single *dirham*. His father left him land and real estate, but he did not take anything from it.” I heard that our master Abu ‘Ali al-Daqqaq – may God have mercy on him – said: “Whenever al-Harith al-Muhasibi extended his hand to a suspicious food,⁷⁹ a vein in his finger would begin to move and he would abstain from it.”

Abu ‘Abdallah b. Khafif⁸⁰ said: “Follow the example of five of our masters and think well of the rest. They are: al-Harith al-Muhasibi, al-Junayd b. Muhammad, Abu Muhammad Ruwaym, Abu ‘I-‘Abbas b. ‘Ata’ and ‘Amr b. ‘Uthman al-Makki. They combined knowledge⁸¹ with [mystical] truths.”

I heard Abu ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami – may God have mercy on him – say: I heard ‘Abdallah b. ‘Ali al-Tusi say: I heard Ja‘far al-Khuldi say: I heard Abu ‘Uthman al-Baladi say: al-Harith al-Muhasibi said: “He who has cleansed his inner self with self-observation and sincerity, God will embellish his external form with pious self-exertion and the following of [the Prophet’s] Sunna.”

It is related that al-Junayd said: “Once I saw al-Harith al-Muhasibi passing by. I noticed traces of hunger on his face. // 46 I told him: ‘Uncle, come into the house and have something to eat.’ He agreed. I entered the house and searched for something to feed him with. At that time, there was in the house some food that was brought to me from a wedding party. So, I took this food and gave it to him. He took a morsel of the food and rolled it in his mouth [with the tongue] several times, then he stood up, threw it into the corridor, and left. When I saw him a few days later, I inquired about this. He answered: ‘I was hungry and wanted to make you happy by eating your food. However, there is between me and God a [special] sign. He does not permit me to eat any suspicious food.’⁸² Therefore He did not allow me to swallow that food. Where did it come to you from?’ I said that it was brought to the house of a relative of mine from a wedding party. I asked him whether he would come in today. He said that he

77 857 C.E.

78 That is, he taught that men, and not God, are the creators and performers of their acts. This was a thesis later advocated by the religious group known as the Mu‘tazilites. See the article “Mu‘tazila” in *EI*.

79 That is, the food that was considered to have been improperly obtained – e.g., provided by an unjust ruler.

80 A famous Sufi of Shiraz, who died in 371/982; on him see *IM*, “Index”, under “Ibn Khafif”.

81 Of the Divine Law.

82 That is, one that was improperly obtained.

would. I gave him a piece of dry bread that we happened to have. He ate it and said: 'If you want to give something to the poor one,⁸³ it should be something like this [piece of bread].'"

Abu Sulayman Dawud b. Nusayr al-Ta'i

He was a person of great importance. Shaykh Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami – may God have mercy on him – told me: Abu 'Amr [b.] Matar told me: Muhammad b. Musayyib told me: Ibn Khubayq told me: Yusuf b. Sibab told me: "Dawud al-Ta'i inherited twenty *dinars* and he ate from them for twenty years." I heard our master Abu 'Ali al-Daqqaq – may God have mercy on him – say: "The cause of Dawud's conversion to asceticism was as follows. He used to wander the streets of Baghdad. Once he was passing through a street, when a group of the bodyguards [of Humayd al-Tusi] pushed him away from Humayd al-Tusi. When Dawud noticed Humayd, he said: 'Fie to the world in which Humayd takes precedence over you!'/47 So, he secluded himself in his house and began to practice ascetic austerities and perform acts of devotion."

Once I heard one of the poor⁸⁴ say in Baghdad that the cause of his conversion to asceticism was that he heard a bereft woman whining: "On which of your two cheeks have appeared the traces of decay? And which of your eyes has flowed out?"

It is also said that the reason for his conversion to asceticism was that he attended the circle of Abu Hanifa,⁸⁵ who told him once: "Abu Sulayman, we have already prepared the [required] equipment."⁸⁶ To which Dawud replied: "So what else is left?" Abu Hanifa answered: "[Only] works in accordance with it." So Dawud said: "My soul prompted me toward seclusion. I told her: 'As long as you sit with them,⁸⁷ you should not speak about any issue at all!' So for a whole year I was sitting with them, but I never spoke about any issue." Sometimes issues would dawn upon me and I would be as eager to discuss them as the thirsty man is eager to drink cold water, yet I would not talk." Thus he achieved what he achieved.

[Once] Junayd al-Hajjam (the Cupper) cupped Dawud al-Ta'i. The latter gave him a *dinar*. Someone told him that this was too much. He answered: "He who has no manliness⁸⁸ has no devotion [to God]." Also he used to say during his night [vigils]: "O my God, my concern for You has annihilated all other mundane concerns and now stands between me and [my] sleep."

83 That is, a Sufi.

84 That is, a Sufi.

85 Abu Hanifa al-Nu'man (d. 150/767), a renowned scholar of Iraq who founded the Hanafi school of law.

86 That is, theoretical knowledge.

87 That is, Abu Hanifa and his followers.

88 *Muru'a*; on this rather vague moral virtue see *EI* under "Muru'a". One of its most important aspects is generosity.

I heard Muhammad b. 'Abdallah al-Sufi say: Muhammad b. Yusuf told me: Sa'īd b. 'Amr told: 'Alī b. Harb al-Mawsili told me: Isma'īl b. Ziyād al-Ta'ī told me: "Dawūd al-Ta'ī's wetnurse told him: 'Don't you want to eat some bread?' He answered: 'Between the chewing of bread and eating a mess of crumbled bread lies the reading of fifty verses [from the Qur'an].'"

On the day Dawūd died, one of the righteous⁸⁹ saw him in a dream as he was running by. He asked him what happened to him. He answered: "I was just released from prison." When the man woke up from his dream, he heard people crying [in the street]: "Dawūd al-Ta'ī has died!"

Someone asked him for an admonition. He answered: "A soldier of death⁹⁰ awaits you!"//48.

Someone came to visit him in his house and saw a jug of water standing right under the sun. He asked him why he did not want to put it in the shade. He answered: "When I put it there, there was no sun, and [later] I was ashamed to show God that I want to walk for the sake of my soul's satisfaction."

Someone came to visit him in his house and started to stare at him. Dawūd told him: "Don't you know that they⁹¹ used to refrain from staring [at one another] as much as they refrained from excessive talk?"

'Abdallah b. Yusuf al-Isbahani told me: Abu Ishaq Ibrahim b. Muhammad b. Yahya al-Mazakki told me: Qasim b. Ahmad told me: I heard Maymun al-Ghazzal⁹² say: I heard Abu 'l-Rabi' al-Wasiti say: I asked Dawūd al-Ta'ī to admonish me. He said: "Fast in this world, break your fast on death and flee from people as if you are fleeing from wild beasts!"

Abu 'Alī Shāfiq b. Ibrahim al-Balkhi⁹³

He was a Sufi master of Khurasan. He spoke a lot about trust in God (*tawakkul*) and was a teacher of Hatim al-Asamm.⁹⁴ It is said that the cause of his repentance was as follows. He was an offspring of a wealthy family. As a young man he set out on a journey to the land of Turks.⁹⁵ Once he entered a sanctuary of idols, where he saw a custodian of the idols. His head and beard were shaved and he was dressed in a purple robe. Shāfiq al-Balkhi told him: "You have the Creator who is living, All-Knowing and All-Powerful. Worship Him and not those idols who neither help nor harm you!" The custodian answered: "If this were so, then [the Creator] would be able to provide you with sustenance in your own country. Why then did you take pains to come here for trade?"//49 Shāfiq took heed and embarked on the path of world-renunciation.

89 That is, a Sufi.

90 In another reading, "the army of the dead".

91 Meaning the first Muslims.

92 In another reading, al-Ghazzali.

93 On him see *IM*, pp. 32–33.

94 See *IM*, pp. 33–34 and pages 36–37 in this book.

95 Probably Central Asia.

Some said that the cause of his conversion to asceticism was as follows. He saw a slave boy who was playing around and rejoicing during a famine, whereas all other people were afraid of it [famine]. Shaqiq asked him: "Where does your liveliness come from? Don't you see that people are suffering from dearth and hunger?" The slave boy said: "What is this to me? My master has a rich village that produces all that we need." Shaqiq took heed and said: "So, his master has a village, and his master is but a poor creature. And yet he [the slave boy] is not concerned about his livelihood. How then can a Muslim be concerned about his livelihood, when his master is so rich?!"

I heard Shaykh Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami – may God have mercy on him – say: I heard Abu 'l-Husayn b. Ahmad al-ʿAttar al-Balkhi say: I heard Ahmad b. Muhammad al-Bukhari say: Hatim al-Asamm said: "Shaqiq b. Ibrahim was a wealthy man, who adhered to the ways of urban young men and kept company with them.⁹⁶ At that time, 'Ali b. 'Isa b. Mahan was the ruler of Balkh.⁹⁷ He was fond of hunting dogs. One of his dogs got lost and it was reported that it was taken by Shaqiq's neighbor. [The ruler] demanded that the man be brought to him. The neighbor ran away, took refuge with Shaqiq and asked for his protection. Shaqiq came to the ruler and said: 'Let him go! The dog is with me and I will return it to you in three days.' They let the man go and Shaqiq went away worried by what he had done. On the third day, one of Shaqiq's friends who was away from Balkh returned there. On the way home he found a dog with a collar and took it with him. He said [to himself]: 'I shall give it to Shaqiq, because he engages in chivalrous behavior.' So he brought the dog to Shaqiq, who recognized in it the ruler's dog. He rejoiced at this and took the dog to the ruler and thus was freed of his obligation. [As a result,] he came to realize [his sinful condition], repented of it and embarked on the path of asceticism."

It is said that Hatim al-Asamm said: "I was fighting Turks side by side with Shaqiq on a day when one could see nothing but falling heads, broken spears and shattered swords. Shaqiq asked me: 'Hatim, how do you feel yourself on a day like this? Don't you feel as if it were the night on which you brought your newlywed wife to your house?'/50 I said: 'By God, no!' He said: 'And I do feel myself today as I did that night!' He then fell asleep in the middle of the battlefield, putting his shield under his head, and I even could hear him snore.'"

Shaqiq said: "If you want to know a man, consider what God has promised to him and what men have promised to him. Then consider to which of these promises his heart is more attached." Shaqiq also said: "Man's fear of God can be known from three things: from what he accepts, from what he rejects and from what he says."

96 Apparently, he belonged to the circle of the sons of the local urban elite, who cultivated a sort of camaraderie and chivalrous behavior, known as *futuwwa*. Sometimes such groups served as local militia.

97 A province in present-day Afghanistan.

Abu Yazid b. Tayfur b. ʿIsa al-Bastami⁹⁸

His grandfather was a Zoroastrian who converted to Islam. He had three sons: Adam, Tayfur and ʿAli. All of them were devotees and ascetics. He [Abu Yazid] died in 261 [875], although some say 234 [848].

I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn – may God have mercy on him – say: I heard Abu ʿI-Hasan al-Farisi say: I heard al-Hasan b. ʿAli say: Someone asked Abu Yazid how he acquired his knowledge [of God]. He answered: “By a hungry stomach and by a naked body.” I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn – may God have mercy on him – say: I heard Mansur b. ʿAbdallah say: I heard ʿAmmi al-Bastami⁹⁹ say: I heard my father¹⁰⁰ say: I heard Abu Yazid say: “I have engaged in spiritual struggle and ascetic exercises for thirty years and found that there is nothing harder for me than the knowledge [of the Divine Law] and adherence to it. And were it not for the disagreement of religious scholars, I would have remained where I was [at the beginning], for the disagreement of scholars is a [divine] blessing, except in one issue – that is, the understanding of God’s uniqueness.”//51 It is said that Abu Yazid did not depart from this world until he had committed to memory the whole of the Qurʾan.

Abu Hatim al-Sijistani informed me: Abu Nasr al-Sarraj told me: He said: I heard Tayfur al-Bastami say: I heard the person nicknamed ʿAmmi al-Bastami say: I heard my father say: Abu Yazid told me: “Let’s go and see a man who is famous for his sainthood.” And that person was indeed one who was often visited [on account of his sainthood] and was renowned for his asceticism. So we came to visit him. When that man left his house and entered the mosque, he spat in the direction of the *qibla*.¹⁰¹ [On seeing this] Abu Yazid turned and went away without even greeting the man. He said: “This man cannot be trusted even as far as [the observance of] the manners of the Messenger of God – may God bless and greet him – are concerned! How can one trust his other claims?”

On the same authority as above it is told that Abu Yazid said: “Once I intended to ask God to save me the trouble of caring about food and women. Then I said [to myself] how can I ask God what the Messenger of God – may God bless and greet him – never [dared] to ask? So, I did not ask God [for that]. Then God – may He be blessed and exalted – protected me from the desire of women in such way that I no longer cared whether there was before me a woman or a wall.”

I heard Shaykh Abu ʿAbd al-Rahman al-Sulami – may God have mercy on him – say: I heard al-Hasan b. ʿAli say: I heard ʿAmmi al-Bastami say: I heard my father say: “I asked Abu Yazid about his beginnings [as a Sufi] and about his asceticism. He answered: ‘Asceticism has no rank.’ I asked him how this could be. He answered: ‘Because I was in the state of asceticism for three days and left

98 Or “al-Bistami” (both pronunciations are possible). On him see *IM*, pp. 68–72.

99 This is a nickname of a famous ascetic Abu ʿImran Musa b. ʿIsa b. Adam.

100 That is, ʿIsa b. Adam al-Bastami (al-Bistami).

101 That is, in the direction of Mecca, toward which the Muslims face during the prayer.

it on the fourth. On the first day I renounced this world and everything in it. On the second day I renounced the Hereafter and everything in it. On the third day I renounced everything other than God. And on the fourth day there was left nothing for me but God alone. So I fell into an ecstasy and I heard a voice telling me: “[When you are] with me, you have no power [of your own].” I cried: “This is exactly what I want!” Then I heard someone say: “You have found [it], you have found [it]!””

Someone asked Abu Yazid: “What is the most difficult thing you have ever encountered on your way to God?” He answered: “It is impossible to describe it.” Someone then asked him: “What, then, was the easiest thing that you subjected your soul to?” He said: “As for this, yes. I called upon her [the soul] to obey God and she refused. Then I denied her water for one year.”

Abu Yazid said: “For thirty years I have been praying. And each time I prayed I felt in my inner self as if I was a Zoroastrian who sought to cut his girdle.”¹⁰² I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn – may God have mercy on him – say: I heard ‘Abdallah b. ‘Ali say: I heard Musa b. ‘Isa say: My father told me that Abu Yazid once said: “When you see a man who is endowed with miracles to such an extent that he can sit on the air, do not be deluded by him until you have tested his [attitude toward] what is permitted and what is prohibited, his observance of the legal rules and of the Divine Law.”

‘Ammi al-Bastami (al-Bistami) said on the authority of his father: “One night, Abu Yazid went to a hospice¹⁰³ in order to recollect God’s name¹⁰⁴ on one of the walls of that hospice. He stayed there until dawn without uttering a word. I asked him about this and he answered: “[While there], there had passed through my mind a [rude] word that I once uttered in my childhood, and I was ashamed to mention God – may He be blessed and exalted.”

Abu Muhammad Sahl b. ‘Abdallah al-Tustari¹⁰⁵

He was one of the greatest Sufi masters. He had no peers in his age in regard to devotional acts and pious scrupulosity. He performed many miracles. He met Dhu 'l-Nun [al-Misri] during the year when he came [to Mecca] on a pilgrimage. It is said that he died in the year 283, although some say that it was in 273.¹⁰⁶

Sahl said: “When I was three years old, I used to stay awake during the night watching my uncle Muhammad b. Sawwar perform his prayers. He kept vigil during the night. He used to tell me: ‘Go away, Sahl, and have a sleep. You are distracting me!’”

102 Non-Muslims living under Muslim jurisdiction were required to wear “a girdle of unbelief” as sign of their affiliation with a non-Muslim community.

103 *Ribat*. This term may also denote a Sufi retreat.

104 *Dhikr*, literally “remembrance” or “recollection” [of God], a common spiritual practice among the Sufis. See *IM*, pp. 317–322.

105 On him see *IM*, pp. 83–87 and Böwering, *Mystical Vision*.

106 That is, 896 and 886 C.E.

I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn – may God have mercy on him – say: I heard that Abu ʿl-Fath Yusuf b. ʿUmar the Ascetic said: I heard that ʿAbdallah b. ʿAbd al-Hamid said: I heard that ʿUbaydallah b. Luʿluʾ said: I heard that ʿUmar b. Wasil al-Basri recounted about Sahl b. ʿAbdallah that he told him: “One day my uncle asked me: ‘Don’t you remember God, Who created you?’ I asked him: ‘How can I remember Him?’ He said: ‘Say by your heart as you move around in your clothes, without however moving your tongue: “God is my watcher.”’ I said this for three nights, then I told him about this and he said to me: ‘Say this seven times during the night.’ I said this, then told him about this. He said to me: ‘Say this eleven times during the night.’ I said this and I felt the sweetness of this in my heart.//53 After one year my uncle told me: ‘Keep on [doing] what I taught you and continue to do this until you enter your grave, for this will benefit you in this world and in the Hereafter.’ I kept doing this for many years and I felt the sweetness of this in my innermost heart. One day my uncle told me: ‘Sahl, how can a man with whom God is always present and whom He always watches and observes commit a sin? So, stay away from sin!’

“I used to seclude myself [from people]. Then [my parents] sent me to a Qurʾanic school. I told [them]: ‘I fear that my internal concentration [on God] might dissipate. Make arrangements with the teacher so that I would come to him for a short while, study with him, and then come back.’ So I began to go to the school. I learned the Qurʾan by heart when I was six or seven years old. I was fasting constantly and ate nothing but barley bread until I turned twelve years of age. When I turned thirteen, I came across a problem and asked my family to send me to Basra, so that I could inquire about it. I arrived in Basra and began to ask local scholars about it. However, none of them was able to satisfy me. Then I left for ʿAbbadan¹⁰⁷ in order to meet a man known as Abu Habib Hamza b. ʿAbdallah al-ʿAbbadani. I asked him about this problem and he answered me. I stayed with him for a while benefiting from his teaching and imitating his good manners. Then I returned to Tustar.¹⁰⁸ There my only meal consisted of a sack of barley that one could buy for one *dirham*, which I ground and from which I made bread for myself. Every night, before dawn, I ate of this just one ounce¹⁰⁹ without salt or seasoning. Thus one *dirham* was enough for me for a whole year. I decided to fast for three nights and to break my fast on the fourth, then on the fifth, then on the seventh, then on the fifteenth. In this way I spent twenty years, whereupon I began to roam the land until I again returned to Tustar. There I used to stay awake all night.”

I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn say: I heard Abu ʿl-ʿAbbas al-Baghdadi say: I heard Ibrahim b. Firas say: I heard Nasr b. Ahmad say: Sahl b. ʿAbdallah [al-Tustari] said: “Every deed that the servant [of God] performs without

107 An island in the mouth of Shatt al-ʿArab that was frequented by early Sufis and ascetics. See *IM*, pp. 17–18.

108 That is, his native town in Iran.

109 That is, around 33 grams.

imitation,¹¹⁰ be it obedience [to God] or disobedience, is done to please his own self, whereas every deed//54 that he performs in imitation [of the Prophet or his companions] is painful to the soul.”

Abu Sulayman ‘Abd al-Rahman b. ‘Atiyya al-Darani¹¹¹

Daran is a village near Damascus. He died in the year 215.¹¹²

I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn say: I heard ‘Abdallah b. Muhammad al-Razi say: Ishaq b. Ibrahim b. Abi Hassan told me: I heard Ahmad b. Abi ‘l-Hawari say: I heard Abu Sulayman say: “He who is doing good during the day, will be rewarded during the night; and he who is doing good during the night, will be rewarded during the day. He who has relinquished his [carnal] desire, God will remove it from his heart, for God – Most High – is too noble to torment the heart with [carnal] desire after it has relinquished it for His sake.” According to the same chain of transmission, he also said: “When [desire for] this life settles down in the heart, [desire for] the Hereafter departs from it.”

I heard Shaykh Abu ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami – may God have mercy on him – say: I heard al-Husayn b. Yahya say: I heard Ja‘far b. Muhammad b. Nusayr [al-Khuldi] say: I heard al-Junayd say: Abu Sulayman al-Darani said: “Whenever a word of spiritual wisdom enters my heart, I would not accept it unless it [is confirmed] by two just witnesses, the [Holy] Book and the [Prophet’s] Custom.” Abu Sulayman said: “The noblest of all deeds is to oppose the lusts of the soul.” He said: “Each thing has its sign; the sign of forgetfulness [of God] is when one stops crying.” He said: “Each thing has its own rust; the rust on the heart’s light is when one’s belly is full.”

He said: “Whatever distracts you from God Most High – be it wealth or a child – brings you misfortune.”

Abu Sulayman also said: “One cold night I was praying in front of a *mihrab*.¹¹³ Cold began to bother me, and I hid one hand//55 from cold, while leaving the other one exposed. Then sleep overcame me and I heard a voice: ‘Abu Sulayman, we have already bestowed upon this one what it deserves. If only there were the other one, so that we could do the same to it!’ I then swore to myself that I would never pray without exposing both hands, whether it is cold or warm.”

Abu Sulayman said: “Once I overslept my personal prayer.¹¹⁴ All of sudden I saw a maiden of paradise who said to me: ‘You sleep, while I am being prepared for you in the female chamber for five hundred years!’”

110 That is, without imitating the actions of the Prophet or an earlier Muslim authority.

111 On him see *IM*, pp. 36–38.

112 That is, 830 C.E.

113 A recess in the wall of the mosque that points toward Mecca, indicating the direction of the prayer.

114 That is, a private, non-canonical prayer.

‘Abdallah b. Yusuf al-Isbahani told me: Abu ‘Amr al-Jawlasti told me: Muhammad b. Isma‘il told me: Ahmad b. Abi ‘l-Hawari told me: “Once I came to visit Abu Sulayman and saw him crying. I asked him why he was crying. He said: ‘Ahmad, how can I not cry? When the night comes, and the eyes close [for sleep], and each lover secludes himself with his beloved, and the lovers of God sit on their feet [in prayer?], and their tears begin to run from their cheeks down onto the floor of the mosque, the Glorious One – may He be blessed and exalted – looks down and calls out: “Gabriel, before My eyes are those who take delight in my words”¹¹⁵ and who find consolation in My remembrance. I am watching them in their seclusion, I am hearing their sighs, and I am seeing their tears. Why don’t you, Gabriel, call upon them and say: ‘What is with all this crying?’ Have you ever seen a beloved who torments his lovers? Or would it be proper for me to punish people who are full of humble adoration for me? I swear by Myself, when they come before Me on the Day of Resurrection, I will unveil before them My Noble Face, so that they would look at Me and I at them!”’”

Abu ‘Abd al-Rahman Hatim b. ‘Unwan¹¹⁶

Some say that his name was Hatim b. Yusuf al-Asamm.¹¹⁷ He was a great Sufi master of Khurasan.//56 He was a disciple of Shaiqi [al-Balkhi] and a teacher of Ahmad b. Khadrawayh.¹¹⁸ People say that he was not deaf and that he only feigned deafness once. Hence this nickname.

I heard that my master Abu ‘Ali al-Daqqaq – may God have mercy on him – said that [once] a woman came to Hatim and asked him a question. It so happened that as she was with him there came from her an [indecent] noise. She was ashamed of this. Hatim then told her: “Speak louder!” and put on a show of deafness. The woman was very relieved and said [to herself] that he must have not heard the noise. Since then, he came to be known as “The Deaf”.

Shaykh Abu ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami – may God have mercy on him – said: I heard Abu ‘Ali Sa‘id b. Ahmad say: I heard my father say: I heard my uncle Muhammad b. al-Layth say: I heard Hamid al-Laffaf say: I heard Hatim al-Asamm say: “Not a single morning passes without Satan asking me: ‘What will you eat [today]?’, ‘What will you wear?’, and ‘Where will you live?’ I answer him: ‘I shall eat death; I shall wear a shroud; and I shall live in a grave.’”

According to the same chain of transmission, he was once asked: “Don’t you desire [anything]?” He answered: “All I desire is that I live from morning to evening in good health.” Someone asked him: “[Does this mean] that not all of your days are healthy?” He answered: “My day is healthy, when I do not disobey God during it.”

115 That is, by reciting the Qur’an.

116 According to an alternative reading, his father’s name was ‘Ulwan.

117 His last name means “the Deaf”. For him see *IM*, p. 33.

118 Or Khidruya; his biography is mentioned on page 38.

It is told that Hatim al-Asamm said: "When I took part in a military expedition, a Turk seized me, threw me on the ground and was about to slaughter me. However, I had no concern for him. I was lying there and waiting for what God Most High had in store for me. As he was groping for his knife, he was hit by a stray arrow that killed him. I pushed him off and stood up."

I heard 'Abdallah b. Yusuf al-Isbahani say: I heard that Abu Nasr Mansur b. Muhammad b. Ibrahim the Jurist said: I heard Abu Muhammad Ja'far b. Muhammad b. Nusayr say: It is told that Hatim said: "Whoever wants to follow our path must adopt four types of death: a white death, that is hunger; a black death, that is to tolerate torments from people; a red death, that is to oppose the urges of the soul in full sincerity; a green death, that is to put one patch upon the other over and over again."

Abu Zakariya Yahya b. Mu'adh al-Razi, the Preacher¹¹⁹

He was unique in his time. He was particularly known for his teaching about hope¹²⁰ and his doctrine of [mystical] gnosis. He arrived in Balkh, stayed there for some time, then returned to Nishapur,¹²¹ where he died in 258.¹²²

I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn say: I heard 'Ubaydallah b. Muhammad b. Ahmad b. Hamdan al-'Ukbari say: I heard Ahmad b. Muhammad b. al-Sari say: I heard Ahmad b. 'Isa say: I heard Yahya b. Mu'adh say: "How can one be an ascetic, if one has no scrupulosity? At first you must reject [out of scrupulousness] that which is not yours, then renounce [out of asceticism] what is yours." According to the same chain of transmission, he also said: "The hunger of the penitents is a test; the hunger of the ascetics is [self-]restraint; the hunger of the voracious ones is a gift [from God]."¹²³

Yahya said: "Forgetfulness¹²⁴ is worse than death, because neglectfulness cuts one off from God, while death cuts one off from creatures." Yahya said: "Asceticism [consists of] three things: need, seclusion, and hunger." Yahya said: "The best thing that you can do to your soul is to keep it busy in every moment by that which is better for her."

It is related that, in Balkh, Yahya b. Mu'adh preached that wealth is better [for man] than poverty. Someone gave him thirty thousand *dirhams*. One of the [Sufi] masters said: "May God bless not this money for him." Then Yahya left for Nishapur. [En route] he was stopped by a thief, who robbed him of all his money.

'Abdallah b. Yusuf al-Isbahani informed me: Abu 'l-Qasim 'Abdallah b. al-Husayn b. Baluya the Sufi related to me: I heard Muhammad b. 'Abdallah

119 On him see *IM*, pp. 92–94.

120 On this Sufi concept see the section on Sufi terminology (pp. 148–155).

121 A city in Khurasan, Iran.

122 That is, 872 C.E.

123 That is, it comes to them without effort through God's grace.

124 That is, neglect of God's commands and prescriptions.

al-Razi say: I heard al-Husayn b. 'Aluya say://58 I heard Yahya b. Mu'adh al-Razi say: "When someone betrays God in secret, God will expose his true self to everyone."

I heard that 'Abdallah b. Yusuf said: I heard that Muhammad b. 'Abd al-'Aziz the Muezzin said: I heard that Muhammad b. Muhammad al-Jurjani said: I heard that 'Ali b. Muhammad said: I heard that Yahya b. Mu'adh said: "When the evildoers honor you, this is [in fact] your dishonor; when they love you, this is nothing but shame for you; and whoever is in need of you, deserves your contempt."

Abu Hamid Ahmad b. Khadrawayh (Khidruya) al-Balkhi

He was a great Sufi master of Khurasan who kept the company of Abu Turab al-Nakhshabi.¹²⁵ He arrived in Nishapur, where he visited Abu Hafs [al-Haddad].¹²⁶ He then set out to Bastam in order to meet Abu Yazid al-Bastami. He was famous for his attachment to *futumwa*.¹²⁷

Abu Hafs said [about him]: "I have seen no one as strongly concentrated [on God] and as sincere in his spiritual state as Ahmad b. Khadrawayh." Abu Yazid [al-Bastami] said: "Ahmad is our teacher."

I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn – may God have mercy on him – say: I heard Mansur b. 'Abdallah say: I heard Muhammad b. Hamid say: "I was with Ahmad b. Khadrawayh during his agony of death. He had just turned ninety-five. One of his disciples asked him a question. His eyes filled with tears and he answered: 'My son, the door at which I have been knocking for ninety-five years is about to open before me and I have no inkling whether it will lead me to felicity or infelicity.'¹²⁸ Do I have the time to answer [such questions]?"

He had a debt of seven hundred *dinars*. His lenders gathered around him. He looked at them and said://59 "O my Lord, You have determined that pledges serve as a guaranty for money-lenders, and now You are taking from them their guaranty."¹²⁹ So settle my accounts!" Then there was a knock on the door and someone asked: "Where are Ahmad's creditors?" His debts were paid and then his spirit departed. He – may God have mercy on him – died in 240.¹³⁰

Ahmad b. Khadrawayh said: "No sleep is heavier than neglectfulness; no slavery is stronger than your carnal desires. Therefore, were neglectfulness not to weigh heavily upon you, you would never succumb to your desire."

125 On him see pages 40–41.

126 A leader of the so-called "path of blame" (*al-malamatiyya*) that flourished in Khurasan in the second half of the third/ninth century; he died between 265/874 and 270/879. See *IM*, pp. 94–99.

127 A code of altruistic and self-denying behavior and selfless generosity that was practiced by some Iranian ascetics and Sufis of the age.

128 That is, to Paradise or Hell.

129 That is, God is about to take his soul, leaving his creditors empty-handed.

130 That is, 855 C.E.

Abu 'l-Hasan Ahmad b. Abi 'l-Hawari¹³¹

He came from Damascus and studied under Abu Sulayman al-Darani and others. He died in the year 230.¹³² Al-Junayd used to say: "Ahmad b. Abi 'l-Hawari is the sweet basil of Syria."

I heard Shaykh Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami say: I heard Abu Ahmad al-Hafiz say: I heard Sa'īd b. 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Halabi say: I heard Ahmad b. Abi 'l-Hawari say: "Whoever looks at this world with longing and affection, God will remove the light of certitude and renunciation from his heart." According to the same chain of transmission, he said: "Whoever performs a [good] deed without following the custom of the Prophet – may God bless and greet him – his deed is worthless. On the same chain of authorities Ahmad b. Abi 'l-Hawari said: "The best weeping is when the servant [of God] weeps over the moments of negligence [of God's commands]." Ahmad also said: "God's greatest temptation for His servant is neglectfulness and the hardness of the heart."//60

Abu Hafs 'Umar b. Maslama¹³³ **al-Haddad**¹³⁴

He came from the village called Kuradabadh, near the gate of the city of Nishapur toward the direction of Bukhara. He was a great [Sufi] master and leader. He died around 260.¹³⁵

Abu Hafs said: "Sins are messengers of unbelief in the same way as fever is a messenger of death." Abu Hafs said: "When you see a disciple who likes [spiritual] concerts,¹³⁶ know that there is in him a residue of vanity." He said: "Good manners on the outside is the sign of good manners inside." He said: "Chivalry consists in being fair [to others], while not demanding fairness [from others]."

I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn say: I heard Muhammad b. Musa say: I heard Abu 'Ali al-Thaqafi say: Abu Hafs used to say: "Whoever does not weigh his spiritual states and deeds at every moment against the Book and the [Prophet's] custom, while at the same time being suspicious of his true motives, should not be counted among the [true] men."¹³⁷

131 See *IM*, pp. 37–38.

132 That is, 845 C.E.

133 Also 'Amr b. Salm or 'Amr b. Aslam.

134 See note 126.

135 That is, 873 C.E.

136 *Sama'*, lit. "hearing" [of music and poetry]; a spiritual concert practiced by many Sufis. See *IM*, pp. 322–325.

137 Abu Hafs may be referring to the adherents of the *malamatiyya* movement of Khurasan, whom he and his followers considered to be superior to any other ascetic or mystical group in the area.

Abu Turab ʿAskar b. Husayn al-Nakhshabi¹³⁸

He was a companion of Hatim al-Asamm and Abu Hatim al-ʿAttar al-Basri. He died in the year 245.¹³⁹ They say that he died in the desert torn to pieces by the wild beasts.//61 Ibn al-Jallaʿ said: “I have kept the company of six hundred masters, yet have never met anyone equal to four of them. Of these, the first one was Abu Turab.”

Abu Turab said: “The poor man’s¹⁴⁰ food is whatever he can find; his clothes are whatever covers him; and his home is wherever he ends up staying.” Abu Turab said: “When the servant [of God] is sincere in his deeds, he will taste their sweetness before actually performing them; and if he strives to make them perfect, he will taste their sweetness and pleasantness in the process of performing them.”

I heard Shaykh Abu ʿAbd al-Rahman al-Sulami – may God have mercy on him – say: I heard my grandfather Ismaʿil b. Nujayd say: “When Abu Turab al-Nakhshabi saw some of his companions doing something he did not like, he would exert himself even more thoroughly and would make his repentance even more stringent. He would say: ‘It is my misfortune that these [unfortunates] were reduced to doing what they do, for God – may He be great and exalted – said: “Verily never will God change the condition of a people until they change it themselves.”’¹⁴¹ He also said to his companions: ‘He who wears patched rags, is begging [for alms]; he who sits in the [Sufi] hostel¹⁴² or in the mosque, is begging; and he who reads aloud the Qurʾanic text from the book for people to hear is also a beggar.’”

I also heard [Ismaʿil b. Nujayd] say that Abu Turab used to say: “There is a pact between me and God that whenever I extend my hand to a prohibited thing, it does not reach it.” Once Abu Turab saw a Sufi disciple of his extending his hand to a [discarded] melon rind after he had been starving for three days. Abu Turab told him: “You are stretching your hand to a melon rind? Then Sufism is not for you. Stick to the bazaar!”

I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn say: I heard Abu ʿl-ʿAbbas al-Baghdadi say: I heard Abu ʿAbdallah al-Farisi say: I heard Abu ʿl-Husayn al-Razi say: I heard Yusuf b. al-Husayn say: I heard Abu Turab al-Nakhshabi say: “My [animal] soul was never able to obtain anything from me except once. When I was on a trip, it craved bread and eggs. So I turned away from my path and came to a village. Suddenly a man fell upon me and grabbed me, crying: ‘This one was together with the thieves!’ [The people of the village] threw me to the ground and beat me with a stick seventy times. [As they were doing this], there came upon us a Sufi who shouted: ‘Woe unto you! This is Abu Turab al-Nakhshabi!’

138 On him see *IM*, pp. 33–34.

139 859 C.E.

140 That is, the Sufi.

141 Q. 13:11.

142 *Khanqah*; a Sufi hostel or lodge; later on, these institutions became the headquarters of Sufi brotherhoods.

So they set me free//62 and apologized before me. The man [who declared me to be a thief] brought me to his house and put in front of me bread and eggs. So I said [to myself]: 'Eat this after seventy lashes!'"

Ibn al-Jalla' narrated: "Abu Turab arrived in Mecca in good spirits. I asked him: 'Where did you eat, master?' He answered: 'I ate one meal in Basra, another one in Nibaj and one meal here.'"

Abu Muhammad 'Abdallah b. Khubayq

He was one of those Sufis who stressed asceticism. A companion of Yusuf b. Asbat, he hailed from Kufa, although he lived in Antioch.

I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn say: I heard Abu 'l-Faraj al-Warathani say: I heard Abu 'l-Azhar al-Mayyafariqini say: I heard Fath b. Shakhraf say: When I met 'Abdallah b. Khubayq for the first time, he told me: "Khurasanian, there are only four things, no more and no less. [They are]: your eye, your tongue, your heart, and your desire. Watch your eye so that it would not see that which is not permitted; watch your tongue so that you would not say with it the things that God knows you do not mean in your heart; watch your heart so that it would contain neither malice nor envy toward any Muslim; and watch your desire so that you would not wish any evil. If you do not have these qualities, then cover your head with ashes, for you will be among the evildoers."¹⁴³

Ibn Khubayq said: "Worry only about things that may harm you tomorrow. And be happy only about things that may make you happy tomorrow!" Ibn Khubayq said: "When servants [of God] alienate themselves from God, He will alienate from them the hearts [of people]. And when they open their hearts to God, He will make everyone open his heart to them." He said: "The best kind of fear is one that shields you from [committing] sins, that which fills you with sorrow over [the good works] that you missed and that which makes you think about the rest of your life. The best kind of hope is one that renders good works easy for you." He also said: "Listening to falsehood for a long time dulls the sweetness of obedience to God in your heart."

Abu 'Ali Ahmad b. 'Asim al-Antaki¹⁴⁴

He was a contemporary of Bishr b. al-Harith, al-Sari al-Saqati and al-Harith al-Muhasibi. Abu Sulayman al-Darani used to call him "The Spy of the Hearts" due to his sharp perspicacity.//63

Ahmad b. 'Asim said: "If you want your heart to be serene, help it by protecting your tongue [from unbecoming statements]." Ahmad b. 'Asim said: "God Most High said: 'Your riches and your children are but a trial'¹⁴⁵ and we want this trial to increase ever more."

143 That is, on the Day of Judgement.

144 On him see *IM*, pp. 38–39. He died in 220/853.

145 Q. 64:15.

Abu 'l-Sari Mansur b. 'Ammar¹⁴⁶

He came from the region of Marw from a village named Dandanaqan, although some say that he came from Bushanj. He later settled in Basra and became a great preacher. Mansur b. 'Ammar said: "Whoever falls into despair because of the afflictions of this world, exposes his faith to affliction." Mansur b. 'Ammar said: "The best dress of the servants [of God] is humility and contrition, while the best dress of the gnostics is righteousness, for God Most High said: 'The dress of righteousness, that is the best.'"¹⁴⁷ They say that the reason for his repentance was that he found on the road a piece of paper on which it was written: "In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate." He picked it up, and when he could not find a place for it, he ate it. Then, in a dream, he heard a voice telling him: "The gate of wisdom has opened for you, because of your respect for this piece of paper."

I heard Shaykh Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami say: I heard Abu Bakr al-Razi//64 say: I heard Abu 'l-'Abbas al-Qass say: I heard Abu 'l-Hasan al-Sha'rani say: I saw Mansur b. 'Ammar in a dream and asked what God had done to him. He answered: "[God] asked me: 'Are you Mansur b. 'Ammar?' I answered: 'Yes, my Lord.' He said: 'Are you the one who encouraged people to renounce this world, while at the same time desiring it yourself?' I answered: 'Yes, this was so indeed, but I did not begin any of my preaching sessions without first praising You, then Your Prophet, and only after that did I begin to admonish people.' God said: 'This is true, so bring him a chair so that he sing My glory in heaven among My angels, as he sang My glory on earth among My servants.'"

Abu Salih Hamdun b. Ahmad b. 'Umara al-Qassar¹⁴⁸

He came from Nishapur. It is through him that the *malamatiyya* teaching¹⁴⁹ spread [among the people of] Nishapur. He was a companion of Salim¹⁵⁰ al-Barusi and Abu Turab al-Nakhshabi. He died in the year 271.¹⁵¹

Someone asked Hamdun: "When can a man speak to people?"//65 He answered: "When it becomes known to him that he should fulfill an obligation imposed on him by God Most High. Or when he knows that someone is destined to perish by [adhering to] a reprehensible innovation¹⁵² and he hopes that God would save that person from it." He said: "Whoever thinks that his soul is better than the soul of Pharaoh has shown pride." He also said: "Since I have learned

¹⁴⁶ He died in Baghdad in 225/839.

¹⁴⁷ Q. 7:26.

¹⁴⁸ On this representative of the *malamatiyya* movement in Nishapur, see *IM*, pp. 94–96.

¹⁴⁹ On this ascetic-mystical movement see *IM*, pp. 94–99.

¹⁵⁰ According to some readings, his name was Salm or Salman. See *IM*, p. 95.

¹⁵¹ 880 C.E.

¹⁵² *Bid'a*; that is, something that was not practiced by the Prophet, his Companions and the Muslims of the next two generations.

that the Ruler¹⁵³ can see through the evildoers, the fear of the Ruler has never departed from my heart.” He said: “Whenever you see a drunk man, stagger like him so that you would not elevate yourself above him, thereby calling upon yourself a similar [affliction].”

‘Abdallah b. Munazil said: I asked Abu Salih to admonish me: “If you can keep yourself from being angry about anything in this life, then do so!”

[Once] a friend of his was dying, as he kept vigil at his bed. When he died, Hamdun put down the fire in the lamp. They told him: “In such circumstances one adds oil to the lamp!” He answered: “Until this moment the oil has belonged to him, but now it belongs to his heirs.”

Hamdun said: “He who looks into the ways of the pious ancestors¹⁵⁴ will realize his shortcomings and his inability to attain the rank of the true men.” He also said: “Do not disclose to anyone things that you would like to be hidden from you.”

Abu 'l-Qasim al-Junayd b. Muhammad¹⁵⁵

He was the leader and master of this [Sufi] community.//66 His family originally came from Nihawand, but he was born and raised in Iraq. His father was a glassware merchant. Because of this he was called “the Bottler”.¹⁵⁶ He was a jurist who adhered to the school of Abu Thawr.¹⁵⁷ When he was just twenty years old he was already issuing legal opinions in the sessions [that were presided over] by Abu Thawr. He studied under his uncle al-Sari [al-Saqati], under al-Harith al-Muhasibi and under Muhammad b. ‘Ali al-Qassab. He died in the year 297.¹⁵⁸

I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn – may God have mercy on him – say: I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn al-Baghdadi say: I heard [Abu Bakr] al-Farghani say: I heard someone asked al-Junayd about the [Sufi] gnostic. He answered: “He who speaks of your secret, even though you yourself remain silent.” I heard Shaykh Abu ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami – may God have mercy on him – say: I heard Muhammad b. ‘Abdallah al-Razi say: I heard Abu Muhammad al-Jurayri say: I heard al-Junayd say: “We learned Sufism not through words but through hunger, the renunciation of this world, and through depriving ourselves from the things which we are accustomed to and in which we take delight.”

I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn – may God have mercy on him – say: I heard Abu Bakr al-Razi say: I heard Muhammad al-Jurayri say: I heard Abu Nasr al-Isbahani say: I heard Abu ‘Ali al-Rudhbari say: I heard al-Junayd say to a man who discoursed upon [divine] gnosis and said: “The possessors of gnosis

153 According to an alternative reading, Satan (*al-shaytan*).

154 That is, the Prophet and the first Muslims.

155 On him see *IM*, pp. 52–56.

156 *Al-Qamariri*.

157 Abu Thawr al-Kalbi (d. 240/854), a renowned jurisprudent and a founder of a school of law that, however, disappeared shortly after his death. See the article “Abu Thawr” in *EL*.

158 910 C.E.

arrive at the state of abandoning any movements¹⁵⁹ through the gates of their devotion and intimate proximity to God – may He be great and exalted.” To this al-Junayd replied: “This is the teaching of those who preach the abandonment of pious works. This, in my view, is nothing but a deadly sin. Even those people who steal and fornicate are better than those who teach this. The gnostics, who know God Most High, took their works from God Most High and through them they will return to Him. Were I to live a thousand years, I would not miss a single minor act of devotion unless I were prevented from it [by forces beyond my control].”

Al-Junayd said: “If it were possible for you to have nothing at your home but a few pottery utensils, so be it!” Al-Junayd said: “All paths are closed for God’s creatures except for those who follow in the footsteps of the Prophet – may peace and blessings be upon him.”//67

I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn – may God have mercy on him – say: I heard Mansur b. ‘Abdallah say: I heard Abu ‘Umar al-Anmati say: I heard al-Junayd say: “If a righteous man who has spent thousands of years contemplating God would turn away from Him for just one moment, his loss would be greater than his gain.” I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn say: I heard Abu Nasr al-Isbahani say: I heard Abu ‘Ali al-Rudhbari say on the authority of al-Junayd: al-Junayd said: “In this affair [of ours]¹⁶⁰ one must not follow anyone who has not learned by heart the Qurʾan and written down the reports of the Prophet, because our knowledge is bound by the [Holy] Book and by the [Prophet’s] custom.” Al-Junayd said: “This teaching of ours is bound by the foundations of the [Sacred] Book and the custom [of the Prophet].” Al-Junayd also said: “This knowledge of ours is reinforced by the reports of the Messenger of God – may God bless and greet him.”

Muhammad b. al-Husayn – may God have mercy on him – informed me: I heard Abu ‘Al-Husayn b. Faris say: I heard Abu ‘Al-Husayn ‘Ali b. Ibrahim al-Haddad say: I attended a lecture of the judge Abu ‘Al-‘Abbas b. Surayj.¹⁶¹ He discoursed on the subject of the roots and the branches [of jurisprudence], and I liked that. When he saw that I liked that, he asked: “Do you know where all this comes from?” I answered: “[Only] the judge [can] say this.” He said: “This [came to me] due to my keeping the company of Abu ‘Al-Qasim al-Junayd.”

Someone asked al-Junayd: “Where did you obtain your knowledge from?” He answered: “Through sitting before God for thirty years under that staircase.” And he pointed to the staircase of his house.

I heard the master Abu ‘Ali [al-Daqqaq] recount this story. I also heard him say: “Someone saw a rosary in his [al-Junayd’s] hand and said to him: ‘In spite of your high [spiritual] rank you still hold a rosary in your hand?’ He answered: ‘I will not abandon the way which has brought me to my Lord.’”

159 That is, the performance of the canonical acts of piety, such as prayer or pilgrimage.

160 That is, Sufism.

161 A famous scholar of Baghdad (d. 308/918), who is sometimes considered to be the real founder of the Shafiʿi school of law.

I heard the master Abu 'Ali al-Daqqaq – may God have mercy on him – say: “Every day al-Junayd came to his store, closed its door and performed four hundred prayer prostrations. He then returned to his house.”//68

Abu Bakr al-‘Atawi said: “I was with al-Junayd, when he died. He read the entire text of the Qur'an and began to recite it anew from ‘The Cow’.¹⁶² He reached the seventieth verse, then died – may God have mercy on him!”

Abu 'Uthman Sa'id b. Isma'il al-Hiri¹⁶³

He resided in Nishapur. He originally came from the city of Rayy, where he studied with Shah al-Kirmani¹⁶⁴ and Yahya b. Mu'adh al-Razi. He then arrived in Nishapur together with Shah al-Kirmani and came to Abu Hafs al-Haddad. He stayed with him for a while until he completed his studies with him. Abu Hafs gave him his daughter in marriage. He died in the year 298.¹⁶⁵ He lived more than thirty years after Abu Hafs's death.

I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn – may God have mercy on him – say: I heard Abu 'Amr b. Hamdan say: I heard Abu 'Uthman say: “Man's faith is not complete until four things have become equal for him in his heart: denial, giving, glory, and humiliation.”

I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn – may God have mercy on him – say: I heard 'Abd al-Rahman b. 'Abdallah say: I heard a companion of Abu 'Uthman say: I heard Abu 'Uthman say: “As a young man I studied with Abu Hafs for a while. Once he drove me away from his assembly and told me not to sit with him any longer. So I stood up, and began to withdraw without turning my back on him, so that my face would be facing his. I proceeded in this manner until I disappeared from his sight. Then I made a vow to dig a hole next to his door and not leave it until he ordered me to do so. When he saw that, he brought me close to himself and made me one of his foremost companions.”

They say that there are only three [people] in this world, to whom there is no equal://69 Abu 'Uthman at Nishapur, al-Junayd at Baghdad, and Abu 'Abdallah b. al-Jalla' in Syria.

Abu 'Uthman said: “For forty years God Most High has not put me in a spiritual state that I would not like, nor did He transfer me to a state that I would resent.”

I heard Shaykh Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami – may God have mercy on him – say: I heard 'Abdallah b. Muhammad al-Sha'rani say: I heard Abu 'Uthman say that.

When Abu 'Uthman fell into unconsciousness [on his death bed], his son Abu Bakr tore up the shirt he was wearing. [Suddenly] Abu 'Uthman opened his

162 The name of the second (and the longest) chapter of the Qur'an.

163 A leader of the *malamatiyya* movement in Khurasan who died in 298/910. See *IM*, “Index”, under “Abu 'Uthman al-Hiri”.

164 For his biography see page 52.

165 910 C.E.

nature of sincerity.” Abu Ahmad al-Maghazili said: “I have not seen anyone more devoted to God than al-Nuri.” Someone said to him: “Not even al-Junayd?” He answered: “Yes, not even al-Junayd.”

Al-Nuri said: “Patched frocks [of the Sufis] used to hide pearls. Today, however, they have become a heap of dung upon corpses.”¹⁷² They say that he used to leave his house every day carrying some bread with him. He would give out this bread as alms on the way, then, around noon, he would enter the mosque. He would then leave the mosque, open his store and fast. His family thought that he ate at the bazaar, while the people of the bazaar thought that he ate at home. He maintained this practice for twenty years.//71

Abu ‘Abdallah Ahmad b. Yahya al-Jalla’

He came from Baghdad, but lived in Ramla¹⁷³ and Damascus. He was a great Sufi master of Syria. He studied with Abu Turab [al-Nakhshabi], Dhu ‘l-Nun al-Misri, Abu ‘Ubayd al-Busri and his father Yahya al-Jalla’.

I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn – may God have mercy on him – say: I heard Muhammad b. ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Tabari say: I heard Abu ‘Umar al-Dimashqi say: I heard Ibn al-Jalla’ say: “I told my father and mother: ‘I want you to give me to God – may He be great and exalted!’ They said: ‘Yes, we give you to God – may He be great and exalted.’ I then left them for a while. I returned to them on a rainy night and knocked on the door. My father asked who was there. I answered: ‘I am your son Ahmad.’ He said: ‘We had a son, but we gave him to God Most High. We are Arabs and therefore do not take our gifts back.’ He did not open the door.”

Ibn al-Jalla’ said: “He for whom blame and praise are equal is an ascetic. He who fulfills religious duties in their proper times is a worshipper. He who sees that all actions and works come from God is a true monotheist. For he sees nothing but the One.”

When Ibn al-Jalla’ died, people looked at him [and saw] that he was laughing. The physician said: “He is alive!” He then felt his pulse and said: “No, he is dead.” He removed the cover from his face and said: “I do not know whether he is dead or alive!”

Under his skin was a vein in the shape of [the word] “God”. Ibn al-Jalla’ – may God have mercy on him – said: “Once I was walking alongside my [Sufi] master and saw a handsome youth. I asked: ‘Master, do you think that God will punish such a [beautiful] form?’ He answered: ‘So, you looked at him, didn’t you? You will soon suffer the consequence [of it]!’//72. And indeed, twenty years later, I forgot the Qur’an.”

172 A hint at the deterioration of the original Sufi values at the hands of al-Nuri’s contemporaries.

173 A town in Syria/Palestine.

Abu Muhammad Ruwaym b. Ahmad

He was born in Baghdad. A great Sufi master, he died in the year 303.¹⁷⁴ He was a teacher of the Qur'an and jurist, who adhered to the school of Dawud [al-Zahiri].¹⁷⁵

Ruwaym said: "The wisdom of the wise man consists of dispensing freely pious admonitions to his [Sufi] brethren, while at the same time imposing them stringently upon himself. His dispensation [of the admonitions] to others means adherence to [religious] knowledge, while his stringent imposition of them upon himself is evidence of pious scrupulosity."

I heard Shaykh Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami – may God have mercy on him – say: I heard 'Abd al-Wahid b. Bakr say: I heard Abu 'Abdallah b. Khafif say: "I asked Ruwaym to give me a piece of advice. He answered: 'This affair¹⁷⁶ is achieved only by exerting one's spirit. If you enter it through this, fine. If not, then you should not engage in the follies of the Sufis.'"¹⁷⁷

Ruwaym said: "When you keep company with any group of people, this is better for you than keeping company with the Sufis. This is because all people study the externals [of religion], whereas this [Sufi] community studies the true realities [of things]. While all people seek to impose upon themselves the outward rulings of the Divine Law, the Sufis impose upon themselves the True Reality of pious scrupulosity and continuous sincerity. Therefore if anyone deviates from them in something that they have achieved, God will remove the light of faith from his heart."

Ruwaym said: "I was walking in a street of Baghdad during a hot afternoon. I was thirsty. I came to a house and asked for water. A girl with a pitcher opened the door. When she saw me, she said: '[This is] a Sufi who drinks during the day!' Since then I have never broken my fast [during the day]." Ruwaym said: //73 "God has bestowed upon you word and deed.¹⁷⁸ If He takes away from you the word and leaves you with the deed, this is a blessing. If He takes away from you the deed and leaves you with the word, this is an affliction. However, if He takes away both from you, this is a terrible punishment."

Abu 'Abdallah Muhammad b. al-Fadl al-Balkhi

He was a resident of Samarqand, originally from Balkh. He was expelled from Balkh and settled in Samarqand, where he died. He studied with Ahmad Khadrawayh [Khidruya] and others. Abu 'Uthman al-Hiri liked him a lot. He died in the year 319.¹⁷⁹

174 915 C.E.

175 A school of law founded by Dawud al-Zahiri (d. 270/884), a scholar with a literalist turn of mind. Closely affiliated with the Hanbali legal school, the Zahiri school gradually disappeared.

176 That is, the mystical path to God.

177 This phrase indicates that Ruwaym represented a strand of piety that did not necessarily endorse the practices and values of the Sufi tradition of Iraq. See *IM*, pp. 99–101.

178 That is, the gift of speech and the ability to act.

179 931 C.E.

I heard Shaykh Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami – may God have mercy on him – say: I heard Ahmad b. Muhammad al-Farra' say: I heard Abu Bakr b. 'Uthman say: Abu 'Uthman al-Hiri wrote [a letter] to Muhammad b. al-Fadl asking him about the signs of wretchedness [in the Hereafter]. He answered: “Three things. When a man is endowed with knowledge but deprived of deeds; when he is endowed with deeds but deprived of sincerity [in performing them]; when he is endowed with the company of the righteous, yet he has no respect for them.” Abu 'Uthman al-Hiri used to say: Muhammad b. al-Fadl is a broker of men.¹⁸⁰

I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn say: I heard 'Abdallah al-Razi say: I heard Muhammad b. al-Fadl say: “Rest in the prison¹⁸¹ is something that the soul should desire.” I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn say: I heard Abu Bakr al-Razi say: I heard Muhammad b. al-Fadl say: “There are four reasons for Islam's departure: [Muslims] do not act in accordance with what they know; they act in accordance with what they do not know; they do not learn what they do not know; they prevent others from learning.” According to the same chain of transmission he said://74 “How strange are those people who cross the deserts in order to arrive at His House¹⁸² and to see the traces of prophecy. Why don't they cross their [lower] souls and their passions in order to arrive at their hearts and to see the signs of their Lord – may He be great and exalted!?”

He said: “When you see a [Sufi] novice, who aspires to good things of this world, this means that he turned his back [on God].” Someone asked him about asceticism. He answered: “When one looks at this world and sees only its imperfection and when one turns away from it with pride, dignity and contempt.”

Abu Bakr Ahmad b. Nasr al-Zaqqaq al-Kabir

He was a contemporary of al-Junayd and a great [Sufi] master of Egypt. I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn – may God have mercy on him – say: I heard al-Husayn b. Ahmad say: I heard al-Kattani say: “When al-Zaqqaq died, the poor¹⁸³ no longer had reason to visit Egypt.”

Al-Zaqqaq said: “Whosoever does not combine [his] poverty with piety is eating prohibited food.”

Shaykh Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami – may God have mercy on him – said: I heard Muhammad b. 'Abdallah b. 'Abd al-'Aziz say: I heard al-Zaqqaq say: “I wandered in the desert of the children of Israel¹⁸⁴ for fifteen days. However, when I had finally found the road, I met a soldier, who gave me some water to drink. Its harshness tormented my heart for the next thirty years.”¹⁸⁵

180 That is, he can see their true intentions.

181 That is, in this life.

182 That is, the Ka'ba in Mecca, which is the principal sanctuary of Islam.

183 That is, the Sufis.

184 That is, in the Sinai.

185 Soldiers, like all state officials, were seen by the Sufis as instruments of oppression. Therefore, the water received from a soldier's hands was deemed to be impure.

Abu 'Abdallah 'Amr b. 'Uthman al-Makki

He met Abu 'Abdallah al-Nabaji and studied with Abu Sa'īd al-Kharraz¹⁸⁶ and others.//75 He was a [great] master of the Sufis and their leader in the science of the fundamentals [of the Divine Law] and the [mystical] path. He died in Baghdad in 291.¹⁸⁷

I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn – may God have mercy on him – say: I heard Muhammad b. 'Abdallah b. Shadhan say: I heard Abu Bakr Muhammad b. Ahmad say: I heard 'Amr b. 'Uthman al-Makki say: “Whatever good thing, splendor, intimacy, beauty, radiance, form, light, person or image which your heart may fancy, which may occur to you in your thoughts or which may appear in the passing whims of your heart – God Most High is far removed from all of this. Have not you heard the words of God Most High: ‘Like Him there is naught, He is the Hearing, the Seeing.’¹⁸⁸ He [also] said: ‘[He] has not begotten, and has not been begotten, and equal to Him there is not any one.’”¹⁸⁹

According to the same chain of transmission, he said: “Knowledge is a guide and fear [of God] is a [caravan] driver. The soul, which is [caught] between them, is obstinate, recalcitrant, deceitful and devious. If you keep warning her by the guidance of knowledge and driving her by the threat of fear, you will achieve your goal.” He also said: “No [clear] expression can be applied to ecstasy,¹⁹⁰ because it is God’s mystery among the believers.”

Samnun b. Hamza¹⁹¹

His *kunya*¹⁹² was Abu 'l-Hasan, though some say it was Abu 'l-Qasim. He studied with al-Sari [al-Saqati], Abu Ahmad al-Qalanisi, Muhammad b. 'Ali al-Qassab and others. It is said that he recited [the following lines]:

I find no delight in anyone but You
So test me as you wish!

As soon as he said that, he was afflicted by urine retention. He then began to go around [religious] schools saying [to the students]:¹⁹³ “Pray for your uncle the Liar!”//76. As he was reciting these lines, one of his companions said to the other: “I heard, the other day, when I was in the countryside, the voice of our master Samnun that begged and humbly entreated God to cure him.” The other man also said: “I too heard that yesterday, when I was in such-and-such place.”

186 On him see pages 53–54 of this book and *IM*, pp. 56–60.

187 903 C.E.

188 Q. 42:11.

189 Q. 112:3–4.

190 According to an alternative reading, “to the ecstatic [person]”.

191 On him see *IM*, pp.63–64.

192 That is, the name of a man’s eldest son (filionymic) that usually precedes the given name.

193 This phrase is missing from some versions of the text.

Others confirmed this also. Samnun was told about this. However, when he was afflicted by urine retention, he tolerated it patiently and never complained. When he heard them saying this, while in fact he never had uttered that prayer or said anything [of this], he realized that God wanted him to show his anguish out of respect for the code of God's servant and in order to conceal his true state.¹⁹⁴ [It was then] that he began to walk around the schools, telling [the school-children]: "Pray for your uncle the Liar!"

I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn – may God have mercy on him – say: I heard Abu ʿl-ʿAbbas Muhammad b. al-Hasan al-Baghdadi say: I heard Jaʿfar al-Khuldi say: Ahmad al-Maghazili told me: "There was a man in Baghdad who distributed forty thousand *dinars* among the poor. Samnun said to me: 'Abu Ahmad, don't you see what this [man] has expended and done, while we have nothing to give as charity? Let's go some place and perform there one ritual bending and prostration for each *dirham* he has donated.' So we came to al-Mada'in¹⁹⁵ and performed forty thousand bending and prostrations."

Samnun had a pleasant character and most of his sayings are about divine love. He was a person of great stature. They say that he died before al-Junayd.

Abu ʿUbayd al-Busri

He belonged to [the generation of] the old Sufi masters and studied with Abu Turab al-Nakhshabi.

I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn – may God have mercy on him – say: I heard ʿAbdallah b. ʿAli say: I heard al-Duqqi say: I heard Ibn al-Jalla' say: "I have met six hundred Sufi masters. Of them no one was equal to the [following] four://77 Dhu ʿl-Nun al-Misri, my father,¹⁹⁶ Abu Turab and Abu ʿUbayd al-Busri."

I heard Shaykh Abu ʿAbd al-Rahman al-Sulami – may God have mercy on him – say: I heard Ahmad b. Muhammad al-Baghawi¹⁹⁷ say: I heard Muhammad b. Muʿammar say: I heard Abu Zurʿa al-Hasani¹⁹⁸ say: "One day Abu ʿUbayd was threshing his wheat on a threshing machine. It was just three days before the Pilgrimage season. Two men came up to him and asked: 'Abu ʿUbayd, do you desire to perform a pilgrimage?' He said: 'No.' He then turned to me and said: 'This master of yours is more capable of doing this than these men!'¹⁹⁹ He meant himself."

194 That is, his ability to tolerate God's affliction without complaint.

195 The ruins of Ctesiphon, the ancient capital of Sasanian Iran.

196 Yahya al-Jalla', a famous ascetic and Sufi.

197 In a different reading, "al-Thaghri".

198 In a different reading, "al-Janbi."

199 It is not quite clear what he was referring to, but some later Sufi commentators suggested that Abu ʿUbayd hinted at his ability to traverse great distances within minutes (*tayy al-ard*). This explanation seems far-fetched. It is more likely that he implied that staying at home during the pilgrimage and concentrating one's thoughts on God is better than taking part in the noisy and ostentatious collective pilgrimage.

Abu 'l-Fawaris Shah b. Shuja' al-Kirmani

He came from a family of kings. He studied with Abu Turab al-Nakhshabi, Abu 'Ubayd al-Busri and those who belonged to this generation. He was a man of *futuwwa*²⁰⁰ and of great importance. He died before the year 300.²⁰¹

Shah said: "Pious scrupulosity is a sign of fear of God and avoidance of suspicious things."²⁰² He also used to say to his companions: "Avoid lies, treachery and backbiting, then do as you see fit."

I heard Shaykh Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami say: I heard my grandfather Ibn Nujayd say: Shah al-Kirmani said: "Whoever turns his sight away from the prohibited, restrains himself from passions, fills//78 his interior with constant self-scrutiny and his exterior with the observance of the Prophet's custom, and forces himself to eat only properly obtained [food], will never be failed in his clairvoyance."

Yusuf b. al-Husayn

He was a [Sufi] master of Rayy and [the province of] Jibal.²⁰³ He was unique in his avoidance of pretension. He was knowledgeable and well educated. He studied with Dhu 'l-Nun al-Misri and Abu Turab al-Nakhshabi and a friend of Abu Sa'ïd al-Kharraz. He died in the year 304.²⁰⁴

Yusuf b. al-Husayn said: "I would rather meet God burdened with all possible sins than with one grain of pretence." Yusuf b. al-Husayn said: "When you see a novice having recourse to dispensations [from an obligatory requirement],²⁰⁵ you must know that nothing good will come out of him." He wrote to al-Junayd: "May God not allow you to taste the temptation of your soul. For once you have tasted it, you will never taste any good forthwith." Yusuf b. al-Husayn said: "I see afflictions of the Sufis in the following things: seeking friendship with adolescents, keeping company with adversaries, and befriending women."

Abu 'Abdallah Muhammad b. 'Ali al-Tirmidhi

He was a great Sufi master, who wrote many works on Sufi science.//79 He studied with Abu Turab al-Nakhshabi, Ahmad b. Khadrawayh [Khidruya], Ibn al-Jalla' and others. Someone asked Muhammad b. 'Ali about the characteristic feature of mankind. He answered: "Outward weakness, yet unlimited pretensions."

200 See note 96.

201 912 C.E.

202 That is, the things that may be improper from the viewpoint of the Divine Law (*al-shari'a*).

203 A province in Iran.

204 916 C.E.

205 On the notion of dispensation in Sufism see *IM*, p. 195. Although legitimate from the viewpoint of the Divine Law, many Sufis considered dispensations to be a sign of one's inability to perform one's duties to the full.

Muhammad b. 'Ali said: "I have not written a single letter about the [Divine] Providence in relation to my own condition. However, whenever my personal circumstances have become strained, I found consolation in it."

Abu Bakr Muhammad b. 'Umar al-Warraq al-Tirmidhi

He resided in Balkh. He studied with Ahmad b. Khadrawayh [Khidruya] and others, and wrote books on [spiritual] self-discipline.

I heard Shaykh Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami say: I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn – may God have mercy on him – say: I heard Abu Bakr al-Warraq say: "Whosoever [seeks to] satisfy his members' passions, has planted in his heart the tree of repentance." I heard Shaykh Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami say: I heard Abu Bakr al-Balkhi say: I heard Abu Bakr al-Warraq say: "If someone is to ask greed about its father, it would answer that it is doubt in that which has been predetermined [by God]. And if it is asked about its occupation, it would answer that it is the acquisition of ignominy. And if it is asked about its goal, it would answer that it is the exclusion [from God's favor]."

Abu Bakr al-Warraq used to prohibit his companions from travels and journeys. He said: "The key to blessing is to remain patiently in the location of your volition until your volition has come to fruition. And when it has come to fruition, the first traces of blessing will appear upon you."

Abu Sa'īd Ahmad b. 'Isa al-Kharraz²⁰⁶

He came from Baghdad. //80 He studied with Dhu 'l-Nun al-Misri, al-Nibaji, Abu 'Ubayd al-Busri, al-Sari [al-Saqati], Bishr [al-Hafi] and others. He died in the year 277.²⁰⁷

Abu Sa'īd al-Kharraz said: "Any interior that is at odds with [its] exterior is mistaken." I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn say: I heard Abu 'Abdallah al-Razi say: I heard Abu 'l-'Abbas al-Sayyad say: I heard Abu Sa'īd al-Kharraz say: "In a dream I saw the Devil. He kept away from me. I said to him: 'Come closer! What's the matter with you?' He answered: 'What can I do to you [folks]?'²⁰⁸ You have divested yourselves of things by which I beguile people!' I asked: 'What is it?' He answered: 'This worldly life!' As he was about to leave, he turned to me and said: 'And yet I have one subtle [ruse] against you.' I asked him what it was. He answered: 'Keeping the company of adolescent boys!'"²⁰⁹

Abu Sa'īd al-Kharraz said: "I have kept the company of the Sufis for God knows how long and never had any disagreement with them." Someone asked

206 On him see *IM*, pp. 56–60.

207 890 C.E.

208 That is, the Sufis.

209 On the practice of mixing with and gazing at beardless boys and adolescents, see Baldick, *Mystical Islam*, pp. 20, 134, 173. It was condemned by some Sufi masters.

him why. He answered: "Because both they and I are fighting our common enemy, our souls."

Abu 'Abdallah Muhammad b. Isma'il al-Maghribi

He was a teacher of Ibrahim b. Shayban and a disciple of 'Ali b. Razin. He lived one hundred and twenty years and died in 299.²¹⁰ He was a unique person. For many years he ate nothing that had been touched by the human hand. Instead he ate the roots of some plants, to which he had grown accustomed.

Abu 'Abdallah al-Maghribi said: "The best of all [pious] works is when you fill the moments [of your life] with acts of obedience [to God]." He also said: "The most despised of all creatures is the poor man who fawns upon a rich man or abases himself before him. And the greatest of all creatures is the rich man who humbles himself before//81 the poor and holds them in high regard."

Abu 'l-'Abbas Ahmad b. Muhammad Masruq

His came from Tus,²¹¹ but he resided in Baghdad. He studied with al-Harith al-Muhasibi and al-Sari al-Saqati, and died in Baghdad in the year 298 or 299.²¹²

Ibn Masruq said: "When one watches God Most High in the movements of his heart, God will protect the movements of his limbs." He said: "Holding in high esteem the sacredness of the believers means holding in high esteem the sacredness of God Most High. Through this the servant [of God] will arrive at the station of the true piety."²¹³ He said: "The tree of [divine] gnosis is watered by contemplation; the tree of negligence [of God] is watered by ignorance; the tree of repentance is watered by remorse. The tree of love [of God] is watered by the water of agreement and compliance [with God's will]."

He also said: "If you aspire to obtain [divine] knowledge without first establishing yourself firmly in the stages of spiritual striving,²¹⁴ you will languish in ignorance forever; and if you try to attain spiritual striving without first realizing fully the station of repentance,²¹⁵ you will be unaware of what you are trying to achieve."

Abu 'l-Hasan 'Ali b. Sahl al-Isbahani

He was a contemporary of al-Junayd. When 'Amr b. 'Uthman al-Makki came to him about a debt that he had incurred, ['Ali b. Sahl] settled it for him. It was

210 That is, in 911 C.E.; according to other sources, he died in 291/904.

211 A city in Iran that was located near present-day Meshhed.

212 That is, 910 or 911 C.E.

213 That is, one should respect the rights of other people as much as one respects the rights of God.

214 That is, the Sufi path.

215 That is, the first station of the Sufi path.

thirty thousand *dirhams*. He met Abu Turab al-Nakhshabi and [the Sufis of] his generation.

I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn say: I heard Abu Bakr Muhammad b. 'Abdallah al-Tabari say://82 I heard 'Ali b. Sahl say: "When you hurry to do acts of piety, this is a sign of Godspeed. When you abstain from acts of disobedience [to God] this is a sign of vigilance. When you keep the secret of your heart of hearts, this is a sign of [spiritual] wakefulness. An ostentatious display of presumptions is [an evidence of] human foolishness. He who does not rest the beginnings of his spiritual striving on a sound foundation, will never achieve sound results."

Abu Muhammad Ahmad b. Muhammad b. al-Husayn al-Jurayri²¹⁶

He was one of the greatest companions of al-Junayd. He studied with Sahl b. 'Abdallah [al-Tustari] and was appointed as successor to al-Junayd [after his death]. He was knowledgeable in the sciences of this community²¹⁷ and possessed an [advanced] spiritual state. He died in 311.²¹⁸

I heard Abu 'Abdallah al-Shirazi [Ibn Khafif] say: I heard Ahmad b. 'Ata' al-Rudhbari say: "Al-Jurayri died in the year of al-Habir.²¹⁹ One year later I was passing by that place and saw him sitting there leaning [on something], his knee to his breast and finger pointing to God."

I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn – may God have mercy on him – say: I heard Abu 'l-Husayn al-Farisi say: I heard Abu Muhammad al-Jurayri say: "When the [animal] soul prevails over someone, he will become a captive of his lustful urges, imprisoned in the jail of passions. God will then deprive his heart of spiritual knowledge and he will be able neither to enjoy the words of God Most High nor to find pleasure in them, even though he may repeat them constantly with his tongue. For God Most High said: 'I shall turn away from My signs those who wax proud in the earth unjustly.'"²²⁰

Al-Jurayri said: "One observes the fundamentals [of the Divine Law]²²¹ by implementing [its] branches²²² and one tests the soundness of the branches by comparing them to the fundamentals. One will never//83 attain to the station of the contemplation of the fundamentals unless one holds in high regard the means

216 On him see *IM*, p. 66.

217 That is, the Sufis.

218 924 C.E.

219 A dune region in Arabia that was the site of an attack on the Muslim pilgrims by the Qarmati sect led by a ruthless rebel leader, Abu Tahir al-Jannabi. It resulted in the capture and massacre of hundreds of pilgrims. See Halm, *The Empire of the Mahdi*, pp. 252–253. From the context of the story it appears that al-Jurayri was among those massacred by the Qarmatis in the desert.

220 Q. 7:146. In the Qur'an the word "signs" may also refer to the verses of the Muslim Holy Book.

221 As laid down in the Qur'an and the Prophet's custom (*al-sunna*).

222 That is, the particular cases to which the fundamentals are applied in everyday legal practice.

and the branches [of the Divine Law]. For God Himself has elevated the latter to a high position.”

Abu ʿI-ʿAbbas Ahmad b. Muhammad b. Sahl b. ʿAtaʾ al-Adami²²³

He was a great Sufi master and scholar. [Abu Saʿid] al-Kharraz used to praise him highly. He belonged to the generation of al-Junayd and was a companion of Ibrahim al-Maristani. He died in the year 309.²²⁴

I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn say: I heard Abu Saʿid al-Qurashi say: I heard Ibn ʿAtaʾ say: “He who obeys the rulings of the Divine Law, God will enlighten his heart with the light of [divine] gnosis, and there is no better station than following in the footsteps of the Beloved²²⁵ – may God bless and greet him – in his commands, his deeds and his moral character traits.” Ibn ʿAtaʾ said: “The greatest negligence is when the servant [of God] neglects God – may He be great and exalted – His commands and prohibitions as well as the proper manners due to Him.”

I heard Abu ʿAbdallah al-Shirazi [Ibn Khafif] – may God have mercy on him – say: I heard ʿAbd al-Rahman Ahmad al-Sufi say: I heard Ibn ʿAtaʾ say: “Whenever you seek something, you should seek it in the arena of [religious] science. If you do not find it [there], [look for it] in the field of wisdom. If you do not find it [there either] weigh it [on the scale] of God’s oneness. And if you do not find it in any of these three places, then strike with it the face of Satan.”

Abu Ishaq Ibrahim b. Ahmad al-Khawwas

He was a friend of al-Junayd and al-Nuri. He had vast knowledge of trust in God²²⁶ and spiritual self-discipline. He died at Rayy in the year 291.²²⁷ He suffered from a stomach disease.²²⁸ Therefore each time he had to stand up, he had to perform a major ablution. Once he entered water²²⁹ and died there – may God have mercy on him.

I heard that Muhammad b. al-Husayn – may God have mercy on him – said: I heard that Ahmad b. ʿAli b. Jaʿfar said: I heard that al-Azdi said: I heard that al-Khawwas said: “Five things serve as a cure for the heart: a thoughtful reading of the Qurʾan, an empty stomach, night vigils, supplications in the early morning, and keeping the company of the righteous.”

223 On this famous Sufi theorist and a close friend of al-Hallaj, see *IM*, “Index” under “Ibn ʿAtaʾ”.

224 922 C.E.

225 That is, the prophet Muhammad.

226 On this concept see *IM*, “Index of terms” under “*tawakkul*”.

227 903 C.E.

228 It appears that he had chronic diarrhea.

229 Perhaps it was a shallow pool attached to the mosque.

Abu Muhammad 'Abdallah b. Muhammad al-Kharraz

He came from [the city of] Rayy and resided in Mecca. He studied with Abu Hafs [al-Haddad] and Abu 'Imran al-Kabir. He was one of those who practiced scrupulous discernment. He died before the year 310.²³⁰

I heard Shaykh Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami say: I heard Abu Nasr al-Tusi say: I heard al-Duqqi say: "I came to Abdallah al-Kharraz after I had fasted for four days. He said: 'One of you has fasted for four days and hunger has begun to call upon him.' He then said: 'If every living soul were to perish for the sake of what it expects from God, do you think that would be a lot?'" Abu Muhammad 'Abdallah al-Kharraz said: "Hunger is the food of the ascetics and remembrance of God is the food of the gnostics."//85

Abu 'l-Hasan Bunan b. Muhammad al-Hammal

He came from Wasit,²³¹ but lived in Egypt where he died in 318.²³² He was a great man, who [was known for his] miracles.

Someone asked Bunan about the most exalted spiritual state of the Sufis. He answered: "Trust in what is predetermined [by God], the fulfillment of [God's] commands, the protection of the heart [from temptations] and withdrawal from both worlds."

I heard that Muhammad b. al-Husayn said: I heard that al-Husayn b. Ahmad al-Razi said: I heard that Abu 'Ali al-Rudhbari said: Bunan al-Hammal was thrown to a lion.²³³ The lion sniffed him, but did him no harm. When he was brought back, someone asked him: "What did you feel when the lion was sniffing you?" He said: "I was thinking about the disagreement of the scholars regarding the saliva of wild animals."²³⁴

Abu Hamza al-Baghdadi al-Bazzaz

He died before al-Junayd. He was a friend of al-Junayd's and studied with al-Sari [al-Saqati] and al-Hasan al-Musuhi. He was an expert on Qur'an recitation and a jurist. He was a descendant of 'Isa b. Aban. Ahmad b. Hanbal used to ask him about various [legal] issues: "What do you say about this, Sufi?"

They say that he was speaking [to students] at his assembly on Friday, when suddenly his condition changed [for the worse] and he fell from his chair. He died on the next Friday. They say that he died in the year 289.²³⁵//86

230 923 C.E.

231 A city in Lower Iraq.

232 928 C.E.

233 This was done on the orders of Egypt's ruler Ahmad b. Tulun (r. 254–270/868–884), who was angered by al-Hammal's criticism of his edicts.

234 That is, whether the saliva of the wild beasts is ritually pure or impure.

235 901 C.E.

Abu Hamza said: "Whosoever knows the path of God Most High will travel on it easily and there is no better guide on the path to God than to follow in the footsteps of the Messenger – may God bless and greet him – as regards his spiritual conditions, actions and words." Abu Hamza also said: "Any man can stay away from evil deeds if [God] has endowed him with three things: an empty stomach with a content heart, continual poverty with constant asceticism, and continual patience with constant recollection [of God]."

Abu Bakr Muhammad b. Musa al-Wasiti²³⁶

He originally came from Khurasan, from the region of Farghana.²³⁷ He studied with al-Junayd and al-Nuri. He was a great scholar. He resided in Marw, where he died after 320.²³⁸

Al-Wasiti said: "Fear and hope are two reins that restrain the servant [of God] from behaving improperly." He said: "The quest of compensation for the acts of obedience [to God] springs from the forgetfulness of [God's] beneficence." Al-Wasiti said: "When God wants to disgrace His servant, He throws him into this perversity and rotting corpses." He meant the companionship of the youth.

I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn – may God have mercy on him – say: I heard Muhammad b. 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Marwazi say: I heard al-Wasiti say: "They have presented bad manners as sincerity, the greed of their souls as freedom of action and their lowly aspirations as firmness of character. Through this they have lost the true path and found themselves in a narrow spot. There is no life in their [spiritual] visions, there is no piety in their speeches. Whenever they utter a word, they reveal anger; when they make a public address, they show vanity. The impetuosity of their souls speaks about the perfidy of their inner selves, and their voracious appetite for food testifies to the darkness of their hearts. God assail them! How perverted they are!"²³⁹

I heard the master Abu 'Ali al-Daqqāq – may God have mercy on him – say: "A man from Marw once heard a pharmacist saying: //87 [One Friday] al-Wasiti was passing by my store on the way to the cathedral mosque. Suddenly a strap of his sandal broke. I told him: "Shaykh, would you allow me to repair your sandal?" He said: "Go ahead, repair!" After I repaired the strap, he asked me: "Do you know why the strap of my sandal was broken?" I said: "[No,] tell me!" He said: "Because I did not wash myself for [the sake of] Friday." I told him: "My lord, here's a bath. Do you want to use it?" He said yes. So I took him to the bath and he washed himself."

236 On him see *IM*, pp. 100–101.

237 In present-day Uzbekistan.

238 932 C.E.

239 Q. 63:4 and 9:30.

Abu 'l-Hasan b. al-Sa'igh

His name is 'Ali b. Muhammad b. Sahl al-Dinawari. He resided in Egypt, where he died. He was a great Sufi master. Abu 'Uthman al-Maghribi said: "I have not seen any Sufi master who was more enlightened than Abu Ya'qub al-Nahrajuri; nor did I see a Sufi master who was so full of awe of God as Abu 'l-Hasan b. al-Sa'igh." He died in the year 330.²⁴⁰

Someone asked Ibn al-Sa'igh about providing a proof of an absent thing by using a thing that is in evidence. He said: "How can one provide proof of Him Who has no semblance or equal by using the attributes of those who have both semblance and equals?!" Someone asked him about the characteristics of the Sufi [novice]. He answered by quoting the words of God: "When the earth became strait for them, for all its breadth, and their souls became strait for them."²⁴¹//88 He also said: "The spiritual states are like lightning. When they last, this is nothing but self-deception and the prompting of one's lower nature."

Abu Ishaq Ibrahim b. Dawud al-Raqqi

He was a great Sufi master of Syria, who was a friend of al-Junayd and Ibn al-Jalla'. He lived a long life and died 326.²⁴² Ibrahim al-Raqqi said: "Divine knowledge is the assertion of God as He is and placing Him beyond whatever one might imagine about Him." He said: "[God's] power is evident and the eyes of men are open, yet the light of spiritual sights has grown dimmer." He said: "The weakest of people is he who cannot repel his passions and the strongest of people is he who is capable of repelling them." He also said: "A sign of love of God is when you choose to obey Him and to follow in the footsteps of His Prophet – may God bless and greet him."

Mimshadh al-Dinawari

He was a great Sufi master. He died in 299.²⁴³ Mimshadh said: "The good manners of the novice consist of obeying the commands of Sufi masters, serving his brethren, abandoning everything except the essentials, and observing the good manners prescribed by the Divine Law." Mimshadh said://89 "I have never entered into the presence of any of my Sufi masters without first divesting myself of everything that is mine in order to partake of the blessings that are imparted to me by seeing them and [listening to] their instructions. When anyone enters into the presence of the master with something that is his own, he will be cut off from the blessings of [the master's] vision, admonition and instruction."

240 941 C.E.

241 Q. 9:118.

242 937 C.E.

243 911 C.E.

Khayr al-Nassaj

He studied with Abu Hamza al-Baghdadi, met al-Sari [al-Saqati] and was a friend of Abu 'l-Husayn al-Nuri. He lived a very long life. They say that he lived one hundred and twenty years. Al-Shibli and [Ibrahim] al-Khawwas repented during his preaching²⁴⁴ and he was the teacher of many others. They say that his name was Muhammad b. Isma'īl. He came from Samarra.²⁴⁵ He was named "Khayr al-Nassaj"²⁴⁶ after the following episode: He set out on a pilgrimage [to Mecca]. [When he reached] the gate of Kufa, a man seized him and said: "You are my slave! Your name is Khayr!" Khayr had a dark complexion. He did not object to the man and the latter employed him as a weaver of silk. Whenever the man called: "Khayr!", he would respond: "At your service!" After a while, the man told him: "I was mistaken. You are not my slave and your name is not Khayr!" So he went away and left the man. He said: "I will not change the name that was given to me by a Muslim."

He said: "Fear is the whip of God by which he straightens the souls that have grown accustomed to bad manners." I heard Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami – may God have mercy on him – say: I heard Abu 'l-Hasan al-Qazwini say: I heard Abu 'l-Husayn al-Maliki say: I asked one of those who were present at Khayr al-Nassaj's deathbed about what happened to him. He answered: "When it was the time for the sunset prayer, he lost consciousness. A few moments later he opened his eyes and pointed toward the door of the house saying:²⁴⁷/90 'Wait, may God protect you! Both you and I are servants, who take their orders [from God]. What you are ordered to do will not elude you, whereas I shall miss what I am ordered to do.' So he called for water and performed an ablution for the prayer. He then stretched himself [on the bed], closed his eyes, uttered the *shahada*,²⁴⁸ and passed away."

Someone saw him in a dream and asked him: "What did God do to you?" He answered: "Don't ask me about this. [All I can say is that] I have finally found rest from this filthy world of yours!"

Abu Hamza al-Khurasani

He was from Nishapur, from the quarter called Mulqabadh. He was a friend of al-Junayd, [Abu Sa'īd] al-Kharraz and Abu Turab al-Nakhshabi. He was a scrupulous and righteous man.

Abu Hamza said: "When someone is frightened by the reminder about [approaching] death, he begins to love everything that is permanent and hate everything that is transitory." He said: "The [divine] gnostic strives to maintain

244 That is, they embraced the Sufi path.

245 A town on the east bank of the river Tigris in Iraq, approximately 80 miles north of Baghdad.

246 That is, "Khayr the Weaver".

247 The context indicates that he was talking to the angel of death, 'Izra'īl.

248 That is, the ritual phrase "There is no deity but God and Muhammad is His messenger".

his life day by day, and he receives his livelihood day by day.”²⁴⁹ A man asked him for a piece of advice. [He answered]: “Prepare provisions for the journey that lies before you.”²⁵⁰

I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn – may God have mercy on him – say: I heard Abu 'l-Tayyib al-‘Akki say: I heard Abu 'l-Hasan al-Misri say: I heard Abu Hamza al-Khurasani say: “I wore a woolen cloak in a consecrated state. Thus, year after year I travel a thousand *farsakhs*,²⁵¹ while the sun was rising and setting on me. As soon as I left my consecrated state, I hurried to re-enter it again.”²⁵²

He died in the year 290.²⁵³

Abu Bakr Dulaf b. Jahdar al-Shibli²⁵⁴

He was born and raised in Baghdad, though his ancestors hailed from Usrushana²⁵⁵ // 91. He studied with al-Junayd and his contemporaries, and was [himself] a great master of his time in his spiritual state, acumen and knowledge. He adhered to the Maliki school of law. He lived eighty-seven years and died in the year 334.²⁵⁶ His grave is located in Baghdad.

After al-Shibli had repented during a teaching assembly of Khayr al-Nassaj, he came to Demavend²⁵⁷ and said: “I have been the ruler of your land. Now discharge me [from my duties]!” At the beginning, his self-exertion [on the path of God] had no limit. I heard the master Abu ‘Ali al-Daqqaq – may God have mercy on him – say: “I was told that he rubbed a lot of salt into his eyes to prepare himself for night vigils. Therefore sleep never overtook him. The great respect for the Divine Law that he showed on his death bed, as reported by Bakran al-Dinawari, is an ample example [of his great piety]!”²⁵⁸

I heard Shaykh Abu ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami – may God have mercy on him – say: I heard Abu 'l-‘Abbas al-Baghdadi say: “At the end of his days al-Shibli – may God have mercy on him – used to say:

249 A pun on the dual meaning of the Arabic word *‘aysh*, which means both “life” and “livelihood” (or “subsistence”). Many Sufi masters insisted that a Sufi should earn enough for one day only and set nothing aside for tomorrow.

250 That is, get ready for the inevitable death and the last judgement.

251 The distance that is covered by a mounted traveler within an hour of journey at a regular pace (approximately three miles).

252 This saying refers to the practice of consecrating oneself before setting out on a pilgrimage to Mecca (*ihram*). Whereas ordinary pilgrims enter the *ihram* only for the duration of the pilgrimage, Abu Hamza claims to have maintained it continuously.

253 902 C.E.

254 On him see *IM*, pp. 64–66.

255 A province in Transoxiana.

256 946 C.E.

257 A province in Iran.

258 The story in question describes the last minutes of al-Shibli’s life. Before he died, he confessed that he had once given as alms a *dirham* that he had found in the market, which was his only sin. When Bakran, who performed the last rites on him, neglected to wash his beard al-Shibli, already in coma, grabbed him by the hand and guided it to the beard. See al-Sarraj, *al-Luma‘*, p. 210.

There are so many [dangerous] places [in this life] that were I to perish in any of them,
I would be a stern warning for the rest of the family.”²⁵⁹

During the month of Ramadan, al-Shibli used to exert himself more than any of his contemporaries. He said: “My Lord has revered this month and I am the first [of my fellow human beings] to glorify it!”//92 I heard the master Abu ‘Ali al-Daqqaq recount this story.

Abu Muhammad ‘Abdallah b. Muhammad al-Murta‘ish

He came from Nishapur, from the quarter called al-Hira, although some say that he came from Mulqabadh. He studied with Abu Hafs [al-Haddad] and Abu ‘Uthman [al-Hiri].²⁶⁰ He was a great man. He used to stay at the Shuniziyya mosque.²⁶¹ He died in Baghdad in the year 328.²⁶²

Al-Murta‘ish said: “Desire [of God] is restraining [your] soul from what it desires, turning [your] full attention to the commands of God Most High, and satisfaction with what [God] has predetermined for you.” He was told that someone can walk on water. He answered: “For me, the person whom God has enabled to resist his passions is far greater than the one who can walk on air.”

Abu ‘Ali Ahmad b. Muhammad al-Rudhbari

He was born in Baghdad and lived in Egypt, where he died in 322.²⁶³ He studied with al-Junayd, al-Nuri, Ibn al-Jalla’ and [the Sufis of that] generation. He was one of the cleverest [Sufi] masters who had profound knowledge of the Sufi path.

I heard Shaykh Abu ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami – may God have mercy on him – say: I heard Abu ‘l-Qasim al-Dimashqi say: Someone asked Abu ‘Ali al-Rudhbari about a man who liked listening to music and who used to say://93 “This is permitted for me, because I have attained such a degree [of perfection] that any change in my internal state no longer has any influence on me.” [Al-Rudhbari] answered: “Yes, he has attained. But he has attained hellfire!” Someone asked him about Sufism. He answered: “This teaching is serious through and through. Do not mix it up with any amusement!”

I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn – may God have mercy on him – say: I heard Mansur b. ‘Abdallah say: I heard Abu ‘Ali al-Rudhbari say: “One sign of delusion is that God treats you well, although you commit sins. You then begin to forsake repentance and remorse as you fancy that [God] will pardon your transgressions and consider this to be God’s lenience toward you.” He said: “My

²⁵⁹ That is, for the rest of mankind.

²⁶⁰ On them see notes 126 and 163.

²⁶¹ That is, a mosque located near the al-Shuniziyya cemetery of Baghdad.

²⁶² 939 C.E.

²⁶³ 933 C.E.

teacher of Sufism was al-Junayd; my teacher of jurisprudence was Abu 'l-ʿAbbas b. Surayj,²⁶⁴ my teacher of polite literature was Thaʿlab²⁶⁵ and my teacher of prophetic reports was Ibrahim al-Harbi.²⁶⁶

Abu Muhammad ʿAbdallah b. Munazil

He was a master of the *malamatiyya*,²⁶⁷ who was unique in his age. He studied with Hamdun al-Qassar. He was a [great] scholar, who wrote down many prophetic reports. He died at Nishapur in the year 329 or 330.²⁶⁸

I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn – may God have mercy on him – say: I heard ʿAbdallah al-Muʿallim say: I heard ʿAbdallah b. Munazil say: “He who neglects a religious duty will inevitably be tested by God Most High, who will cause him to neglect the Prophet’s custom; and as soon as one has been tested by neglecting the Prophet’s custom, he will also be tested by a [reprehensible] innovation.”²⁶⁹

I heard Shaykh Abu ʿAbd al-Rahman al-Sulami say: I heard Abu Ahmad b. ʿIsa say: I heard ʿAbdallah b. Munazil say: “Your best moments are when you are safe from the promptings of your [lower] soul and when [your] neighbors are safe from your thinking ill [of them].”//94

Abu ʿAli Muhammad b. ʿAbd al-Wahhab al-Thaqafi

He was a great religious leader of his age. He studied with Abu Hafs [al-Haddad] and Hamdun al-Qassar. It was during his lifetime that Sufism appeared in Nishapur. He died in 328.²⁷⁰

I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn say: I heard Mansur b. ʿAbdallah say: I heard Abu ʿAli al-Thaqafi say: “If someone could absorb all the sciences and keep the company of many different people, he would still be unable to attain the rank of the real men²⁷¹ unless he engages in [ascetic] exercises under the supervision of a [Sufi] master, a religious leader or a sincere preacher. If someone has not learned his manners from a teacher who has shown him the faults of his works and the flippancy of his soul, you must not follow his example in rectifying [your own] works.”

Abu ʿAli – may God have mercy on him – said: “There will come a time when life will not be happy for any man in this community unless he seeks the

264 A famous legal scholar of Baghdad, who was the head of the Shafiʿi school of law in his age; he died 306/918. See “Ibn Surayd” in *EI*.

265 A famous grammarian of Kufa, who died in 291/904.

266 A famous traditionalist and man of letters, who died in 285/898. See “Ibrahim al-Harbi” in *EI*.

267 See above note 126.

268 940 or 941 C.E.

269 Many Muslim scholars saw any innovation that was not attested by the Prophet’s custom as a grave sin.

270 939 C.E.

271 That is, educated Sufi masters.

support of a hypocrite.” He also said: “Say fie to the good things of this life, when it treats you well and fie to the losses [that you suffer] in it, when it turns its back on you. An intelligent man will never put his trust in something that treats you well one moment and turns its back on you the next.”

Abu ʿl-Khayr al-Aqtaʿ

He was of Maghribi background and resided at Taynat.²⁷² He had many miracles and possessed [the gift of] clairvoyance.//95 He was a man of great stature. He died around the year 340.²⁷³

Abu ʿl-Khayr said: “No-one can achieve a noble [spiritual] state unless he always complies [with God’s will],²⁷⁴ embraces good manners, fulfills all the religious duties and keeps the company of the righteous.”

Abu Bakr Muhammad b. ʿAli al-Kattani

He came from Baghdad and studied with al-Junayd, al-Kharraz and al-Nuri. He resided in Mecca until he died in the year 322.²⁷⁵

I heard that Shaykh Abu ʿAbd al-Rahman al-Sulami – may God have mercy on him – said: I heard that Abu Bakr al-Razi said: “Al-Kattani saw an old man with white hair and white beard begging among people. He said: ‘This is a man who neglected the rights of God in his youth, therefore God neglected him in his old age.’ Al-Kattani said: ‘Passion is the rein of Satan. Whosoever takes Satan’s rein in his hand, inevitably becomes his slave.’”

Abu Yaʿqub Ishaq b. Muhammad al-Nahrajuri

He studied with ʿAmr al-Makki, Abu Yaʿqub al-Susi, al-Junayd and others.//96 He died in Mecca, where he resided for some time, in the year 300.²⁷⁶

I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn say: I heard Abu ʿl-Husayn Ahmad b. ʿAli say: I heard al-Nahrajuri say: “This world is a sea and the next world is a coast. The ship is fear of God, and all people are a party of seafarers.”

I heard that Muhammad b. al-Husayn said: I heard that Abu Bakr al-Razi said: I heard that al-Nahrajuri said: “Once I saw a one-eyed man circumambulating the Kaʿba. He was saying: ‘I take refuge from you by you!’ I asked him what kind of prayer that was. He answered: ‘One day I looked at a [handsome] person and took a liking to him. All of a sudden, there was a blow on my eye and it popped out. I heard a voice saying: ‘A blow for each look; if you do it again, I’ll do it to you again too!’”

272 A village in Syria.

273 951 C.E.

274 As expressed in the Qurʾan and the Prophet’s custom.

275 933 C.E.

276 912 C.E.

I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn say: I heard Ahmad b. 'Ali say: I heard al-Nahrajuri say: "The best of all [spiritual] states is one that agrees with the knowledge [of the Divine Law]."

Abu 'l-Hasan 'Ali b. Muhammad al-Muzayyin

He came from Baghdad. He studied with Sahl b. 'Abdallah al-Tustari, al-Junayd and [the Sufis of their] generation. He died in Mecca, where he resided, in the year 328.²⁷⁷ He was famous for his scrupulous piety.//97

I heard Shaykh Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami say: I heard Abu Bakr al-Razi say: I heard al-Muzayyin say: "A sin that follows an [earlier] sin is the punishment for the previous sin. A good deed that follows an [earlier] good deed is the reward for the previous good deed." Someone asked al-Muzayyin about God's oneness. He answered: "When you know that the attributes of the Most High are distinct from the attributes of His creatures. He is different from them in His attributes due to [His] eternity, whereas they differ from Him in their attributes due to their creaturely nature." He also said: "If someone is not fully satisfied with God, God will make him dependent on His creatures; and if someone is fully satisfied with God, God will make His creatures dependent on him."

Abu 'Ali b. al-Katib

His name is al-Hasan b. Ahmad. He studied with Abu 'Ali al-Rudhbari, Abu Bakr al-Misri and others. He was a person of great stature. He died around the year 340.²⁷⁸ Ibn al-Katib said: "When fear [of God] settles down in the heart, the tongue begins to utter only things that it really means." Ibn al-Katib said://98 "The Mu'tazilites²⁷⁹ have stripped God of creaturely attributes with the help of the intellect and erred. The Sufis, on the other hand, have stripped God of creaturely attributes with the help of the knowledge [of the Divine Law] and hit the mark."

Muzaffar al-Qirmisini

He was a [Sufi] master from the mountain.²⁸⁰ He studied with Abu Sa'ïd al-Kharraz and others.

Muzaffar al-Qirmisini said: "There are three types of fasting. The fasting of the spirit, which is to curtail one's hope; the fasting of the intellect, which is to resist one's passions; and the fasting of the soul, which is to restrain oneself from food and prohibited things." Muzaffar said: "The worst kind of attachment is

277 939 C.E.

278 950 C.E.

279 A school of Islamic theology that stressed a rational approach to the Muslim Revelation. They presented God as an absolutely transcendent entity of which no positive judgement can be made, because that would result in likening Him to His creatures. See "Mu'tazila" in *EI*.

280 According to some commentators, this is Mount Qasyun at the outskirts of Damascus (presently within the city limit).

attachment to women in whatever form!" He said: "When hunger is supported by contentment, it becomes a [fertile] field for [pious] thoughts, a spring of wisdom, the revival of prudence, and the lamp of the heart." He said: "The best of the servants' deeds is when [they] protect their moments – that is, they do not fall short in anything, nor do they go beyond a set limit." He also said: "If someone has not learned his good manners from a wise man, then a novice should not study with him."

Abu Bakr 'Abdallah b. Tahir al-Abhari

He was a friend of al-Shibli and one of the [Sufi] masters of the mountain.²⁸¹ He was learned and pious. He studied with Yusuf b. al-Husayn and others.//99 He died around the year 330.²⁸²

I heard Shaykh Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami say: I heard Mansur b. 'Abdallah say: I heard Abu Bakr b. Tahir say: "The poor²⁸³ must have no desire. If, however, it is unavoidable, then his desire should not exceed his [minimal] subsistence" – that is, what he requires to live. According to the same chain of transmission, he also said: "When I love a brother in God, I try to deal with him as little as possible in this world."

Abu 'l-Husayn b. Bunan

He studied with Abu Sa'īd al-Kharraz. He was a great [Sufi] master of Egypt. Ibn Bunan said: "If concern for livelihood has settled down in a Sufi's heart, he should preoccupy himself with [pious] works, for this would bring him closer to God. A sign of his heart's reliance on God is that he is more sure about what is in the hands of God than about what is in his own hands." He also said: "Keep away from base morals as you keep away from the things that are prohibited [by the Divine Law]."

Abu Ishaq Ibrahim b. Shayban al-Qirmisini

He was the greatest [Sufi] master of his age. He studied with Abu 'Abdallah al-Maghribi, [Ibrahim] al-Khawwas and others. I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn say: I heard Abu Zayd al-Marwazi al-Faqih say: I heard Ibrahim b. Shayban say: "If someone aspires to laziness and idleness, he should practice dispensations."²⁸⁴ According to the same chain of transmitters, he said: "The knowledge of self-annihilation [in God] and subsistence [in God]²⁸⁵ turns on the sincere profession

281 See the previous note.

282 941 C.E.

283 That is, the Sufi master.

284 That is, dispensations from some of the severer Sufi requirements that were seen as legitimate by some Sufi masters, yet were looked down upon by the more stern Sufi shaykhs. For details see *IM*, pp. 194–195.

285 On these notions see "Baka' wa-fana'" in *EI*.

of [the doctrine of] Divine oneness and a true worship of God. The rest is [Devil's] snares and heresy."

Ibrahim also said: "The lowly rabble are those who disobey God – may He be great and exalted."

Abu Bakr al-Husayn b. 'Ali b. Yazdanyar

He came from Urmiya.²⁸⁶ He practiced a method of Sufism that was peculiar to him and he was learned and pious. He reproached some gnostics²⁸⁷ for the pronouncements and statements that they had made.

Ibn Yazdanyar said: "Don't try to achieve intimacy with God if you love intimacy with people. Don't try to love God if you like to concern yourself with things that should not concern you. Don't strive to obtain a [high] rank in the eyes of God if you love a [high] rank in the eyes of people."

Abu Sa'īd b. al-A'rabī

His name is Ahmad b. Muhammad b. Ziyad b. Bishr. He resided at the Holy Sanctuary,²⁸⁸ where he died in the year 341.²⁸⁹ He studied with al-Junayd, 'Amr b. 'Uthman al-Makki, al-Nuri and others.

Ibn al-A'rabī said: "The greatest losers are those who show only their good works to people, for He Who is 'nearer to him [man] than the jugular vein'²⁹⁰ will expose evil deeds [anyway]."

Abu 'Amr Muhammad b. Ibrahim al-Zajjajī al-Naysaburi

He resided in Mecca for a long time and died there. He studied with al-Junayd, Abu 'Uthman [al-Hiri], al-Nuri, [Ibrahim] al-Khawwas and Ruwaym [b. Ahmad]. He died in the year 348.²⁹¹

I heard Shaykh Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami – may God have mercy on him – say: I heard my grandfather Abu 'Amr b. Nujayd say: "Someone asked Abu 'Amr al-Zajjajī: 'How come that you lose control each time you utter [the phrase] "God is the greatest" at the time of the ritual prayer?' He answered: 'Because I fear that I may open my ritual prayer with something other than sincerity. When someone says: "God is the greatest", whereas in his heart there is something that he considers to be greater than God or when, at some point in time, he held something to be greater than God, then he has declared himself to be a liar by his own tongue.'" He said: "When someone speaks about a [spiritual] state that he has not yet attained, his words are a temptation for those who listen

286 According to an alternative reading, he was a native of Armenia.

287 Some manuscripts have "Iraqis" instead of "gnostics".

288 That is, in Mecca.

289 952 C.E.

290 Q. 50:16.

291 939 C.E.

to him and an empty claim. [Furthermore,] God will not allow him to attain this state.”

He lived in Mecca for many years, yet he never performed his ritual ablutions in the sanctuary. Rather he would go to some place [outside the sanctuary] and perform his ablutions there.²⁹²

Abu Muhammad Ja‘far b. Muhammad b. Nusayr

He was born and raised in Baghdad. He studied with al-Junayd and associated himself with his circle. He also studied with al-Nuri, Ruwaym, Samnun and other [Sufis] of that generation. He died in Baghdad in the year 348.²⁹³

Ja‘far said: “The servant [of God] cannot mix the pleasure of dealing with God with the pleasure of his animal soul. That is why the men of the true realities cut all mundane ties which cut them from God, before these ties can cut them from God.”

I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn say: I heard Muhammad b. ‘Abdallah b. Shadhan say: I heard that Ja‘far said: “Before the servant [of God] can attain [the state of] direct encounter with God, the fear of God must install itself in his heart. When the fear of God has installed itself in his heart, the blessing of the knowledge [of the Divine Law] will descend upon it and the desire of this world will disappear from it.”

Abu ‘l-‘Abbas al-Sayyari

His name is al-Qasim b. al-Qasim. He came from Marw. He studied with [Abu Bakr] al-Wasiti and followed [his method] in regard to the sciences of this [Sufi] community. He was a [famous] scholar. He died in the year 342.²⁹⁴

Someone asked Abu ‘l-‘Abbas al-Sayyari how the [Sufi] novice should control himself. He answered: “By patiently fulfilling [God’s] commands, avoiding that which [God] prohibited, keeping the company of the righteous and serving the poor.” He also said: “The intelligent man finds no pleasure whatsoever in contemplating God, because the contemplation of God leads to [his] self-annihilation²⁹⁵ [in God], and there is no pleasure in this.”

Abu Bakr Muhammad b. Dawud al-Dinawari

He was known as “al-Duqqi”. He resided in Syria and he lived more than one hundred years. He died in Damascus after 350.²⁹⁶ He studied with Ibn al-Jalla’ and al-Zaqqaq.

292 He did so out of reverence for the holiness of the Meccan sanctuary.

293 959 C.E.

294 953 C.E.

295 See note 285.

296 961 C.E.

Abu Bakr al-Duqqi said: "The stomach is where [all kinds of] food are gathered. If you put there a pure food, your members will engage only in pious deeds. If you put there a [food of] uncertain origin, your progress along the path to God will become uncertain. When you put there an unlawfully obtained food, a veil will appear between you and God's command."

Abu Muhammad 'Abdallah b. Muhammad al-Razi

He was born and raised in Nishapur. He studied with Abu 'Uthman al-Hiri, al-Junayd, Yusuf b. al-Husayn, Ruwaym [b. Ahmad], Samnun [al-Muhibb] and others. He died in the year 353.²⁹⁷

I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn – may God have mercy on him – say: I heard 'Abdallah al-Razi say: Someone asked ['Abdallah al-Razi] why people know their faults, yet do not correct them. He answered: "Because they busy themselves with competing with one another in [the superiority of their] knowledge [of the Divine Law] and yet they do not put their knowledge to use. They busy themselves with the externals, instead of busying themselves with improving their internal natures. Therefore God has made their hearts blind and prevented their limbs from performing the acts of worship."

Abu 'Amr Isma'il b. Nujayd

He studied with Abu 'Uthman [al-Hiri] and met al-Junayd. He was a man of great stature and the last of Abu 'Uthman's disciples to die. He died at Mecca in the year 366.²⁹⁸

I heard Shaykh Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami – may God have mercy on him – say: I heard my grandfather Abu 'Amr b. Nujayd say: "If a spiritual state does not spring from the knowledge [of the Divine Law], it brings harm rather than benefit to its possessor." [Al-Sulami] said: I also heard that he said: "If someone has neglected to perform a religious duty imposed upon him by God, he will be deprived of the pleasure of [performing] this duty at some point."

Someone asked him what Sufism is. He answered: "Patience under [God's] commands and prohibitions." [Al-Sulami] said: [Ibn Nujayd] said: "One of the servant's worst afflictions is his satisfaction with what he has achieved."

Abu 'l-Hasan 'Ali b. Ahmad b. Sahl al-Bushanji

He was one of those men of Khurasan who practiced chivalry. He met Abu 'Uthman [al-Hiri], Ibn 'Ata' [al-Adami], al-Jurayri and Abu 'Amr al-Dimashqi. He died in 348.²⁹⁹

297 964 C.E.

298 976 C.E.

299 959 C.E.

Someone asked al-Bushanji what [true] manliness is.³⁰⁰ He answered//106: "When you relinquish things that [God] prohibited to you in the presence of the noble writing angels."³⁰¹ Someone asked him: "Pray to God on my behalf." He said: "May God protect you from your [own] temptation!" He also said: "The beginning of faith is linked to its end."³⁰²

Abu 'Abdallah Muhammad b. Khafif al-Shirazi³⁰³

He studied with Ruwaym [b. Ahmad], al-Jurayri, Ibn 'Ata' [al-Adami] and others. He died in the year 371.³⁰⁴ He was a great [Sufi] master who was unique in his epoch.

Ibn Khafif said: "[Spiritual] aspiration [to God]³⁰⁵ is constant toil and the forsaking of rest." He said: "Nothing is more dangerous for the [Sufi] novice than to allow himself to rely on dispensations³⁰⁶ and to accept allegorical interpretations [of the Scripture]." Someone asked him about nearness to God. He answered: "It is when you are getting near to Him by complying [with His will], whereas He is getting near to you by constantly granting you success [in your undertakings]."

I heard Abu 'Abdallah al-Sufi say: I heard Abu 'Abdallah b. Khafif say: "During my early days [as a Sufi] I used to recite the phrase 'He is God, One'³⁰⁷ ten thousand times [as I was performing] any one part of the ritual prayer. Sometimes I recited the entire Qur'an during each part of the prayer, and sometimes I performed one thousand prayers between the early morning and the late afternoon."

I heard Abu 'Abdallah b. Bakuya al-Shirazi – may God have mercy on him – say: I heard Abu Ahmad the Junior (al-Saghir) say: "Once a beggar came up [to us] and said to the master Abu 'Abdallah b. Khafif: 'I hear [Satan's] whisper!' The master told him: 'I am accustomed to the Sufis making mockery of Satan. However, this time Satan is making mockery of them!'"

I heard Abu 'Abbas al-Karkhi say: I heard that Abu 'Abdallah b. Khafif said: "When I became too frail to perform my supererogatory prayers standing upright, I began to perform each part of the prayer twice in the sitting position. For a report from the Prophet says: 'The prayer of the sitting one is a half of the prayer of the standing one.'"

300 Manliness was part of the chivalry code practiced by some young men in Khurasan.

301 That is, the angels who record all of man's deeds; cf. Q. 82:11 "There are over you watchers noble, writers who know whatever you do."

302 For a longer version of this statement that links it to Q. 98:5, see al-Sulami, *Tabaqat*, p. 484. The idea is to emphasize that a declaration of faith must be subsequently supported by the meticulous fulfillment of the requirements of the Divine Law.

303 On him see *IM*, "Index" under "Ibn Khafif".

304 982 C.E.

305 Ibn Khafif is referring here to the progress of the novice along the Sufi path.

306 See note 205.

307 Q. 112:1.

Abu 'l-Husayn Bundar b. al-Husayn al-Shirazi

He was an expert on the fundamentals [of jurisprudence] and possessor of a great [spiritual] state. He studied with al-Shibli and died in Arrajan³⁰⁸ in the year 353.³⁰⁹

Bundar b. al-Husayn said: "Do not oppose your soul. Leave it to its [true] Master and He will do with it what He wants!" Bundar said: "Keeping the company of the innovators leads to turning one's back on God." Bundar said://108 "Abandon the dictates of your passions for the sake of your hopes."³¹⁰

Abu Bakr al-Tamastani

He studied with Ibrahim al-Dabbagh and others. He was unique in his age in his knowledge and [spiritual] state. He died in Nishapur after the year 340.³¹¹

Abu Bakr al-Tamastani said: "The greatest bliss is when you leave behind your soul, for the soul is the thickest veil between you and God." I heard Abu 'Abdallah al-Shirazi – may God have mercy on him – say: I heard Mansur b. 'Abdallah al-Isbahani say: I heard Abu Bakr al-Tamastani say: "As soon as the heart has become preoccupied [with something other than God], it is punished." He also said: "The path is clear and the [Holy] Book and the Prophet's custom are among us. The merit of the Companions [of the Prophet] is well known due to the fact that they emigrated [with the Prophet]³¹² and accompanied him. Those of us who have chosen as their companions the [Holy] Book and the Prophet's custom, and who have emigrated with their hearts from their souls and from the creatures to God's presence, are the veracious ones who have thereby achieved their goals."

Abu 'l-'Abbas Ahmad b. Muhammad al-Dinawari

He studied with Yusuf b. al-Husayn, Ibn 'Ata' and al-Jurayri. He was a great and distinguished scholar. He came to Nishapur and stayed there for a while. He was preaching to its people and spoke to them in the language of [divine] gnosis. Thereupon he left for Samarqand, where he died after the year 340.³¹³

Abu 'l-'Abbas al-Dinawari said: "The most simple [type of] recollection [of God] is when you forget everything but Him and the ultimate recollection is when the one who recollects [God] forgets his recollection in the process of recollection."//109 Abu 'l-'Abbas said: "The tongue of one's outward state does not change what is inside [one's heart]."³¹⁴ Abu 'l-'Abbas al-Dinawari also said: "They have demolished the pillars of Sufism and destroyed its path. They have

308 A town in the province of Fars in Iran.

309 964 C.E.

310 That is, salvation.

311 951 C.E.

312 From Mecca to Medina, where the Prophet established the first Muslim community.

313 951 C.E.

314 That is, one's outward state reflects one's inward state.

changed its meanings by giving them new names. They dub desire 'increase', bad manners 'sincerity', the abandoning of truth 'ecstatic utterance',³¹⁵ the enjoyment of what is blameworthy 'bliss', the following of one's passions 'temptation', the embrace of this world 'arrival', amorality 'determination', stinginess 'perseverance', begging 'good works', and idle talk 'incurring blame [upon oneself]'. However, this was not the way of the folk³¹⁶ [in the past]."

Abu 'Uthman Sa'id b. Sallam al-Maghribi

He was the only one of his kind in his epoch. No one before him had similar qualities. He studied with Ibn al-Katib, Habib al-Maghribi, Abu 'Amr al-Zajjaji, Ibn al-Sa'igh and others. He died in Nishapur in the year 373.³¹⁷ [Before he died,] he asked that the imam Abu Bakr b. Furak³¹⁸ pray over his body.

I heard the teacher Abu Bakr b. Furak say: "I was in Abu 'Uthman al-Maghribi's house before he died. 'Ali al-Qawwal the Junior was reciting something. When his [Abu 'Uthman's] condition changed for the worse, we told 'Ali to keep silence. At this point, Shaykh Abu 'Uthman opened his eyes and asked why 'Ali was not reciting anything. I told one of those who were there, 'Ask him, what does he hear?' For I myself was ashamed of asking him about this while he was in such a state. They asked him and he answered://110 'He hears only what [God] allows him to hear.'"³¹⁹

He distinguished himself as a practitioner of strict self-discipline. Abu 'Uthman said: "Fear of God is when one stops at the limits [set by God] without either falling short [keeping back] or overstepping them." He also said: "If you prefer the company of the rich to the company of the poor, God will punish you by the death of the heart."

Abu 'l-Qasim Ibrahim b. Muhammad al-Nasrabadhi³²⁰

He was the [greatest Sufi] master of Khurasan in his age. He studied with al-Shibli, Abu 'Ali al-Rudhbari and al-Murta'ish. He settled in Mecca in the year 366³²¹ and died there in 367.³²² He was an expert on *hadith* and transmitted many [of them].

I heard Shaykh Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami – may God have mercy on him – say: I heard al-Nasrabadhi say: "When you catch a glimpse of the Divine Truth, allow neither Paradise nor the hellfire to distract you from it. And when

315 For this notion see Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy*.

316 *Al-qawm*; that is, the Sufis.

317 983 C.E.

318 On him see article "Ibn Furak" in *EI*.

319 That is, he hears only what his overall spiritual condition in the eyes of God permits him to hear.

320 On him see *IM*, pp. 130 and 138.

321 976 C.E.

322 977 C.E.

you have returned from this state, honor that which God has [commanded] to honor!"//111 I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn say: Someone told al-Nasrabadhi that there was a [certain] man, who keeps company with women, saying: "I am protected by God from sinful thought whenever I watch them." He answered: "As long as there is at least a semblance of the human body, there remains [God's] command and prohibition, and man is told to comply with what was commanded and what was prohibited to him. And he who encourages the ambiguous, will eventually be exposed to the prohibited."

I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn – may God have mercy on him – say: al-Nasrabadhi said: "The root of Sufism is to hold onto the [Holy] Book and the custom [of the Prophet], to abandon passions and innovations, to show respect for the [Sufi] masters, to seek excuses for [God's] creatures, to constantly repeat prayers, and to avoid dispensations from obligatory requirements and allegorical interpretations."

Abu 'l-Hasan 'Ali b. Ibrahim al-Husri al-Basri³²³

He resided in Baghdad. Renowned for his [exalted] spiritual state and eloquence, he was the Sufi master of his age. He belonged to the circle of al-Shibli. He died in Baghdad in the year 371.³²⁴

Al-Husri said: "Some people say that al-Husri makes no mention of supererogatory acts. Yet, I have been reciting [supererogatory] litanies since my youth, so that whenever I neglect just one bow during the prayer, I am punished." He also said: "If someone lays false claims to the [mystical] reality, his lie will be exposed when the irrefutable divine proofs are revealed."³²⁵

Abu 'Abdallah Ahmad b. 'Ata' al-Rudhbari

He was a son of Shaykh Abu 'Ali al-Rudhbari's sister. He was the greatest master of Syria in his age. He died in Tyre³²⁶ in 369.³²⁷//112

I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn say: I heard 'Ali b. Sa'ïd al-Massisi say: I heard Ahmad b. 'Ata' al-Rudhbari say: "As I was riding a camel, its foot sank into the sand. I said: 'God is great!' Then the camel also said: 'God is great!'" Whenever Abu 'Abdallah al-Rudhbari and his companions were invited to a house of the common people or non-Sufi folk, he would not tell the poor³²⁸ about this. He would first host them in his house and feed them. After they had eaten, he would tell them about the invitation and they would go together to that place. By that time they would be so well fed that they would not touch the food

323 In some editions of the *Epistle* his name is spelled "al-Baqri".

324 981 C.E.

325 That is, on the Day of Judgement.

326 A city in southern Lebanon.

327 980 C.E.

328 That is, his Sufi companions.

prepared for them except a little. He did this so that the common people would not think ill of this [Sufi] community nor commit sins because of them.

It is said that once Abu 'Ali al-Rudhbari walked behind the poor, because it was his wont to do so. As they were on their way to a dinner at somebody's house, a grocer shouted at them: "Look at these transgressors!" And he started to berate them, saying among other things the following: "One of them borrowed one hundred *dirhams* from me and never returned them to me. Where can I find him now?" When they entered the house to which they were invited Abu 'Abdallah al-Rudhbari said to the host, who was an admirer of the Sufi folk: "If you want my heart to be at ease, lend me one hundred *dirhams*." The host gave them to him immediately. [Abu 'Abdallah] then said to one of his companions: "Take this hundred [*dirhams*] to such-and-such grocer and tell him that this is the money that one of us borrowed from him. There was an excuse for his not returning it on time, but he has finally sent it to you, so accept his apology!" The man went away and did [as Abu 'Abdallah told him]. As they were returning from the dinner, they passed by the grocer's store. On seeing them the grocer began to praise them, saying: "They are trustworthy people who keep their promises, they are the righteous!" and suchlike things.//113

Abu 'Abdallah once said: "The most repugnant creature is a greedy Sufi."

Conclusion

The imam and master Abu 'l-Qasim – may God be pleased with him – said: Here I have mentioned some of the masters of this [Sufi] community in order to show that all of them have a great respect for the Divine Law, that they are committed to the paths of spiritual [self-]discipline, that they follow unswervingly the Prophet's custom and that they never neglect a single religious rule. They all agree that whoever is remiss in the rules of proper conduct or in striving for perfection and does not build his life on scrupulous piety and fear of God lies before God in whatever he claims. Such a person is deluded. Not only has he perished himself, but also he has caused to perish those who were deluded by his lies.

Chapter 2

AN EXPLANATION OF THE EXPRESSIONS USED BY THIS [SUFİ] COMMUNITY AND OF THEIR DIFFICULTIES

It is well known that each group of scholars has its own terms which it employs within itself. These terms are unique to each group, which has agreed on them for its purposes, namely (1) to bring these terms closer to the understanding of those to whom they are addressed, and (2) by articulating them, to help the people of this art to better comprehend their meaning.

The people of this community¹ use these terms among themselves with the goal of unveiling their meaning to one another, achieving concision and concealing them from those who disagree with their method, so that the meaning of their words would be hidden from outsiders. They have done so to protect their mysteries from being spread among those to whom they do not belong. For their realities cannot be assembled by self-exertion or acquired by any deliberate action. They are nothing but [subtle] meanings that God deposits directly into the hearts of [His] folk,² [after He has] prepared their innermost selves for [the reception of] these realities.

By this explanation we intend to facilitate the understanding of the meaning of these terms by those who want to follow their [Sufi] path and their custom.

The [mystical] moment (*waqt*)³

According to those who have fully realized the true meaning of things,⁴ the moment is an expected event whose occurrence depends on a real event. [In other words,] the real event is a moment for the expected event. When you say: “I shall come at the beginning of the month”, [your act of] coming is expected,⁵ whereas the beginning of the month is real.⁶ Thus, the beginning of the month is the moment for [your] coming.

I heard that the master Abu ‘Ali al-Daqqaq – may God have mercy on him – said: “The moment is what you are in [now]. If you are in this world, then your moment is this world. If you are in the Hereafter, then your moment is the Hereafter. If you are in joy, then your moment is joy. If you are in sorrow, then your moment is sorrow.” By this he meant that a moment is a state that dominates a person.

1 That is, the Sufis.

2 That is, the Sufis.

3 The usual meaning of this word is “time”. Our translation of the term is determined by its usage in Sufi discourses.

4 *Ahl al-tahqiq*, lit. “truth-realizers”, or “verifiers”.

5 Because it exists only in your plans.

6 Because it exists independent of your volition.

Sometimes by the moment one means the time in which one finds oneself. Others say that the moment is something that lies between two times – that is, the past and the future.

The Sufis say: “The Sufi is the son of his moment.” They mean that he engages in the worship//115 that is most appropriate for his current situation and performs what is required of him at this moment in time. It is said that the poor man⁷ does not care about his past or future. All that matters for him is the moment in which he is now. Therefore, they say: “Anyone who preoccupies himself with the past moment wastes another moment.”

Sometimes, by the moment the Sufis mean the fulfillment of God's will with regard to them, when they cannot choose any action for themselves [of their free will]. They say: “Someone is under the command of the moment”, meaning that he has surrendered to the workings of the unseen,⁸ exercising no free choice of his own. This applies only to those things that are not imposed on believers by God or which He requires of them in accordance with the Divine Law. For when you neglect a divine command, or abandon what is prescribed for you by [God], or pay no attention to your shortcomings [in complying with God's will], then you have simply departed from your religion.

They say: “The moment is a sword”, meaning that in the same way as the sword cuts [through things], the moment is the [unavoidable] fulfillment of what God has determined and brought to pass. It is also said that the sword is gentle to the touch, yet its edge cuts. He who treats it gently survives, whereas he who resists it will be destroyed. The same is true of the moment. Whosoever surrenders to its command survives, and whosoever resists it is thrown down and falls on his face. They recite the following verse about this:

As if it were a sword, when you treat it gently, it is gentle to your touch,
While its edges are harsh, when you treat it harshly.

If someone is assisted by the moment, then this moment becomes [his] moment, but if one is at odds with the moment, then this moment becomes [his] affliction.

I heard the master Abu 'Ali al-Daqqaq say: “The moment is like a file: it grinds you down, yet it does not erase you completely.” He meant the following: If it obliterates and annihilates you, you would be saved at the very moment you have become annihilated [from yourself]. However, it takes just a part of you, without erasing you completely. To this effect he recited the following verse:

Each passing day takes some part of me
It bestows regrets upon my heart, then goes away.

He also recited:

⁷ That is, the Sufi.

⁸ That is, divine predestination.

As with the inhabitants of Hell: when their skin has been burned completely,
New skins are given to them [to renew] their torments.//116

And to a similar effect:

Dead he is not, who, in his death, has found repose.
But dead is he, who is dead among the living.

Clever is he who has come under the command of his moment. If his moment is sobriety, he follows closely the Divine Law; but if his moment is annihilation [in God], he comes under the command of the True Reality.⁹

The [mystical] station (*maqam*)¹⁰

The station is the good manners which the servant of God realizes after he has entered it.¹¹ He can arrive at it by means of his own actions, by fulfilling its requirements through [concerted] effort and self-imposed strictures in worshipping [God]. A person's station is where he stands in terms of all of this as well as in terms of [acts of] self-discipline he is practicing to obtain it.

A precondition of the station is that you cannot advance from one station to the next unless you have fulfilled the requirements of the former. [For instance,] if you have not mastered [the station of] contentment (*qana'a*), you cannot achieve [the station of] true trust in God (*tawakkul*); if you have not mastered trust in God, then you cannot earn [the station of] true submission [to the divine will]. Likewise, he who has not mastered [the station of] repentance (*tawba*) cannot obtain [the station of] turning [to God] in repentance (*inaba*); one who has not mastered [the station of] scrupulous discernment [between the licit and the illicit] (*wara'*) is not ready for [the station of] renunciation [of this world].

As for [the word] *muqam*,¹² it means [the act of] "being placed",¹³ in the same way as the word *mudkhal* ("entry") may mean the act of being entered or the word *mukhraj* ("exit") may mean the act of being driven out. For one cannot enter a station unless one witnesses God – Most High – placing him into that station. Then and only then can one build one's affair on a sound foundation.¹⁴

9 That is, he becomes witness to God's sublime mysteries that are hidden from the common believers.

10 On this Sufi concept see *IM*, pp. 303–309.

11 That is, the station.

12 A variant reading of the term "station" (*maqam/muqam*). The latter carries slightly different connotations, especially those of passivity, which the author tries to highlight.

13 That is, being placed by God into a certain station.

14 That is, the progress from station to station implies both the wayfarer's personal effort and God's continual assistance without which the goal cannot be achieved.

I heard the master Abu 'Ali al-Daqqaq – may God have mercy on him – say: “When al-Wasiti¹⁵ arrived in Nishapur, he asked the disciples of Abu 'Uthman [al-Hiri]¹⁶: ‘What did your master usually command you to do?’ They answered: ‘He used to command us to practice acts of obedience [toward God], while keeping in sight our shortcomings [in performing them].’ Al-Wasiti responded: ‘Then he taught you nothing but pure Zoroastrianism (*al-majusiyya al-mahda*).¹⁷ He should have commanded you to forget about them¹⁸ and contemplate the One Who is their true originator and performer!’”¹⁹ In saying so, al-Wasiti only wanted to warn them against self-conceit, not to push them toward the path//117 of negligence or to give them license to transgress any of the good manners.

The [mystical] state (*hal*)²⁰

According to the Sufis, the mystical state is something that descends upon the hearts [of the mystics] regardless of their intentions, their [attempts to] attract it, or their [desire to] earn it. This can be [the states of] joy, grief, expansion, contraction, passionate longing, vexation, awe or need.

States are [divine] gifts, whereas stations are earnings. States come without asking, whereas stations are acquired by the sweat of one's brow. The possessor of a station is firmly established in it, whereas the possessor of a state can be taken up out of his state [at any moment].

Someone asked Dhu 'l-Nun al-Misri²¹ about the [divine] gnostic. He answered: “He was here [a moment ago], but left.” One Sufi master said: “States are like [flashes of] lightning. If they persist, they are but self-deception.” The Sufis say: “States are like their name”²² – that is, they alight upon the heart only to leave it instantaneously. They recite the following poetic lines:

If it [the state] were not changing constantly, it would not be named *hal*.
 Everything that changes, passes
 Look at the shadow: as soon as it has reached its full size
 And become long, it begins to wane!

Some Sufis have pointed out that the states can last and endure. They say that the states that do not last and continue are but flashes of light (*lama'ih*) and

15 On Abu Bakr al-Wasiti (d. 320/932) see *IM*, pp. 100–101.

16 On this famous ascetic from Nishapur see *IM*, “Index”.

17 Because this approach presupposes that human beings have control over their own acts, whereas, in al-Wasiti's view, the only true actor and doer is God. Therefore, he accused Abu 'Uthman and his disciples of practicing “Zoroastrianism” (namely, dualism).

18 That is, the acts of obedience.

19 This anecdote refers to the debates between the supporters of human free will and those who saw all human acts as being predestined and created by God.

20 See *IM*, pp. 303–309.

21 See Chapter 1, pages 19–20.

22 The Arabic root *HWL*, from which the word *hal* is derived, connotes inconstancy, transition, and change.

unexpected appearances (*bawadih*). Those who experience them have not yet arrived at true states. Only when this experience lasts can it be called “state”.

Abu 'Uthman al-Hiri said: “For forty years God has not placed me in a state that I disliked.//118 He was referring to the permanence of [his] contentment,²³ and contentment is counted among the states. On this issue one must say the following: Those who say that the states perdure are correct. A certain experience may become a man’s personal portion in which he will grow. The person who has an enduring state also has other states, [named] the “night visitors”. They do not persist in the same way as the states that have become part of his persona. When the “night visitors” perdure with him, as were the previous states, he can advance to new states that are more lofty and subtle than the ones before them. Thus he never ceases to advance further and further.

I heard that the master Abu 'Ali al-Daqqaq – may God have mercy on him – commented on the words of the Prophet – may God bless and greet him: “My heart was covered with a veil until I began to ask God’s pardon seventy times a day.”²⁴ He [Abu 'Ali] said: “The Prophet – may God bless and greet him – was constantly advancing in his states. Whenever he had advanced from a lower state to a loftier one, he would take notice of the one he had just left behind and consider that state to be a veil in relation to the one in which he now found himself. His states were thus becoming ever more intense.”

The favors that God – may He be blessed – has predetermined [for His creatures] are infinite. Since the True Reality of God – Most High – is [supreme] majesty and therefore one can never truly attain Him, then the servant of God has to be constantly advancing in his states. Whenever he has attained an experience, God – may He be blessed – has already predetermined that there is a higher one and that he is bound to attain it. It is in this sense that one should understand their [Sufi] saying: “The good deeds of the righteous are the evil deeds of the ones who are brought nigh [to God].”²⁵ When someone asked al-Junayd about this [phrase], he recited the following:

Flashes of light that shine, when they appear,
Reveal the secret and announce the unification
[with the Divine].

Contraction (*qabd*) and expansion (*bast*)

These two states come after the servant has advanced above the state of fear and hope. For the divine gnostic contraction is the same as the state of fear is for the beginner. [Likewise,] for the gnostic expansion is the same as the state of hope is for the beginner.//119 The difference between contraction and fear, on the one hand, and between expansion and hope on the other, is this: fear is when

23 That is, his contentment with the portion allotted to him by God.

24 Wensinck, *Concordance*, vol. 5, p. 38b.

25 Q. 56:11.

someone fears something in the future – for instance, the loss of something pleasant or the occurrence of something dangerous. Likewise, hope is when one expects something pleasant [to happen] in the future, or anticipates that something unpleasant will go away or that something undesired will come to an end. As for contraction and expansion, they spring from something that is already there. When someone fears or hopes, his heart in both these states is attached to the future. The moment of the person in the state of contraction or expansion is determined by the experience that dominates him in his immediate present.

The characteristics of [the Sufis] in contraction and expansion differ to the extent they differ in their states. One experience may cause a contraction that leaves room in its possessor for other things since he has not perfected it. At the same time, in another person it may leave no room for anything other than this experience, because it consumes him entirely. One Sufi said [about this experience]: “I am crammed full!” – that is, there is no room at all in me [for anything else].

The same is true of a person in the state of expansion. He may experience an expansion that encompasses [at least] some creatures and does not estrange him from most things. At the same time, one may become expanded so much as not to be affected by anything under any condition. I hear that Shaykh Abu ‘Ali al-Daqqaq – may God have mercy on him – said: “One Sufi entered the house of Abu Bakr al-Qahtabi.²⁶ The latter had a son who engaged in [unseemly] pastimes that are common among the youth of his age. It so happened that the visitor chanced upon that son while he and his friends were preoccupied with their follies. The visitor felt a great pity for al-Qahtabi and said: ‘O poor master! What a terrible affliction this son must be for him!’ When the visitor entered al-Qahtabi’s room he saw him behave as if he was not aware of [his son’s] unseemly entertainment. He was surprised by this and said: ‘May I be the ransom of him who cannot be moved even by the steadfast mountains!’ Al-Qahtabi replied: ‘We have been liberated from the bondage of the things [of this world] since pre-eternity!’” //120

Contraction is caused by an experience that descends upon one’s heart. It may imply censure²⁷ or indicate that one is liable for chastisement. As a result, contraction enters the heart and it contracts. When, however, an experience is caused by closeness²⁸ or by [God’s] turning [to the servant] with gentleness and hospitality, then what enters the heart is expansion. In general, one’s contraction corresponds to one’s expansion and one’s expansion to one’s contraction.

There may be a contraction whose cause and motive elude the person who experiences it. He feels contraction in his heart, yet he does not know its cause.

26 In some variants of the text his name is spelled “al-Qahti”.

27 That is, God’s dissatisfaction with His servant.

28 Between God and man.

Such a person should surrender [to his state], until its time has come.²⁹ For if he contrives to expel it or tries to anticipate its attack beforehand on his own accord, his contraction will only become worse. This may be seen [by God] as improper behavior on his part. If, on the other hand, he surrenders himself completely to the rule of time, contraction will soon go away, for God – may He be blessed – said: “[It is] God [who] grasps and outspreads.”

Expansion may come suddenly. It strikes a man unexpectedly as he is unaware of its motive; it shakes and startles him. This man should try to remain quiet and to observe the rules of proper behavior, since in such a moment he is exposed to a grave danger. May this man then beware of [God's] hidden ruse!³⁰ One of the Sufis said about this: “The door of expansion was open to me, but I slipped and was veiled from my [mystical] station.”³¹ Some Sufis have said about this: “Stand on the [outstretched] carpets [of closeness to God], but beware of familiarity!”

The people of true realization consider the states of contraction and expansion to be among the things that one should avoid, because in relation to the states above them, such as the servant's annihilation and dissolution in the True Reality,³² they are but poverty and need.

I heard Shaykh Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami say: I heard al-Husayn b. Yahya say: I heard Ja'far b. Muhammad say: I heard al-Junayd say: “My fear of God contracts me; my hope [for His mercy] expands me; the True Reality makes me one [with Him]; the Divine Truth³³ separates me [from Him]. When He grasps me with fear, He detaches³⁴ me from myself; when He outstretches me with hope, He returns me to myself; when He makes me one by the True Reality, He places me in His presence; when He separates me from the Divine Truth,³⁵ He makes me witness other things and veils me from Himself. And in all this God Most High is my sole mover, not my restrainer; He is the one who abandons me, not the one who shows intimacy to me. In His presence I taste the food of my existence. O would that He annihilated me from myself, then endowed me with [a new] existence! O would that He took me from myself, then breathed [a new] life into me!”//121

Awe (*hayba*) and intimacy (*uns*)

Both of these are above contraction and expansion, in the same way as contraction is above fear [of God] and expansion is above the station of hope. [Likewise,] awe

29 That is, until it leaves the mystic by itself.

30 That is, God can send expansion, which brings excessive joy and exaltation, to him as a temptation.

31 That is, his prior efforts to achieve an advanced station on the path to God were annulled as a result of his slippage.

32 That is, the Godhead.

33 That is, the Divine Law that lays out the rights of God (*huquq Allah*); hence another possible translation: “the Right of God”, instead of “the Divine Truth”.

34 Lit. “annihilates”.

35 See note 33.

is higher than contraction and intimacy is more perfect than expansion. The True Reality of awe is absence.³⁶ Each awestricken person is absent [from himself]. The awestricken vary in their awe to the extent that they vary in their absence. Some of them [are higher] than others.

Intimacy requires true sobriety, for each intimate [friend] is sober. They too differ from one another according to their personal share.³⁷ This is why they say: "The minimal requirement for intimacy is when you throw someone into a blazing fire and this does not perturb his intimacy." Al-Junayd – may God have mercy on him – said: "I used to hear al-Sari³⁸ say: 'The servant of God reaches a point when he can be struck on the face with the sword without taking notice of it.' [At first], my heart refused to believe in it, but gradually it has become clear to me that this was indeed the case."

It is recounted that Abu Muqatil al-ʿAqqi said: "I came to al-Shibli's place and found him plucking out the hair of his eyebrows with a pair of tweezers. I told him: 'O my master, you do this to yourself, but your pain strikes me right in the heart!' He answered: 'Woe to you! The Truth has shown Itself to me and I cannot bear It. And here it is: I inflict pain upon myself in the hope that when I finally feel it, this³⁹ will be veiled from me. However, I feel no pain, so it is not veiled from me and I cannot bear it any more.'"

When the states of awe and intimacy appear, the people of the Truth⁴⁰ consider it to be a deficiency, because they entail a change in the servant of God.//122 The spiritual states of the people of constancy⁴¹ are above such change. They are completely effaced⁴² by their encounter with the [Divine] Essence. Therefore they can experience neither awe nor intimacy and have neither knowledge nor sense.

There is a famous story about Abu Saʿid al-Kharraz.⁴³ He recounted: "Once I was lost in the desert and began to recite [the following verses]:

I have lost my way and because of my loss I know not who I am
 Except what people say about me and my ilk.
 I raise myself above the jinn and men of this land
 And when I can no longer find anyone, I raise myself above myself!

Suddenly, I heard a voice addressing me:

36 From anything other than God.

37 That is, their individuality.

38 Al-Junayd's uncle, a famous mystic of Baghdad. See *IM*, pp. 51–52.

39 The referent of this pronoun is obscure. It may refer to the Truth, in which case it should be in the feminine, which it is not. The editors suggest "the pain (*alam*; masc.) of the Truth", but this seems far-fetched. We may be dealing with a textual corruption.

40 That is, the accomplished Sufi masters and gnostics.

41 *Ahl al-tamkin* – that is, those advanced mystics who are firmly established in their states.

42 Lit. "erased".

43 A Sufi teacher of Baghdad. See *IM*, pp. 56–60.

O you who see [secondary] causes as the pinnacle of your being
 And who delight in a contemptible loss⁴⁴ and in intimacy
 Were you truly one of the people who have found God⁴⁵
 You would become absent from all existent beings as well as from
 the Divine Throne and the Footstool.
 You would stand in the presence of God without any mystical state
 And you would be protected [by God] from taking notice of both
 men and jinn!"

The servant of God rises above this state through [the state of] finding God.

**[The states of] ecstatic behavior (*tawajjud*), ecstatic rapture (*wajd*),
 and ecstatic finding (*wujud*)**

Ecstatic behavior is [an attempt] to deliberately stimulate ecstatic rapture. The person in this state does not experience a complete ecstasy, for if he did, he would be an ecstatic [in the full meaning of this word]. The verbal form *tafaʿul*⁴⁶ usually presupposes a [deliberate] display of a certain feature, which does not belong [to the person displaying it]. A poet said [about this]:

I deliberately tried to narrow my eye (*takharaztu*),⁴⁷ although my eye is not
 narrow by its nature
 Then I shut my eye tightly, although I am not a one-eyed man.

Some [Sufis] said that ecstatic behavior is inappropriate for the one who seeks to bring it about, because it involves a deliberate effort and thus distances him from true realization. Others [disagreed], saying that it is appropriate for the poor who have divested themselves of everything and who are watching out for such things to happen. Their argument rests on the report from the Messenger of God – may God bless and greet him – that says: “Cry, and if you do not cry, then [at least] pretend that you are crying!”

In a famous story about Abu Muhammad al-Jurayri⁴⁸ – may God have mercy on him – he says: “I was in al-Junayd’s house together with Ibn Masruq and other [Sufis]. Among us there was a singer. Ibn Masruq rose [in order to dance] and others followed him. Only al-Junayd remained in his place. I asked him: ‘O

44 Or “pride”. A pun based on the two meanings of the word *tih* – namely, “to be lost” and “to be proud”.

45 *Ahl al-mujud*. This term carries several connotations, which makes it rather difficult to render into English. One can translate it both as “people who have found [God]” or “people of divine being”.

46 That is, the verbal form upon which the word *tawajjud* is patterned.

47 This phrase is supposed to highlight the meaning of the verbal form mentioned in the previous note.

48 A Sufi of al-Junayd’s circle, who succeeded him as head of the movement. He died in 312/924. See *IM*, p. 66.

my lord, what do you think about [Sufi] concerts?"⁴⁹//123 He answered: "Thou shalt see the mountains that thou supposest fixed, passing by like clouds."⁵⁰ He then said: "And you, Abu Muhammad, what do you think about the concerts?" I answered: "My lord, when I come to a place where there is a Sufi concert and [see] there a person for whom I have respect, I restrain myself from ecstasy. But when I am alone, I give free rein to my ecstasy and behave ecstatically." In this story al-Jurayri explicitly approved ecstatic behavior, and al-Junayd did not object to him.

I heard Abu 'Ali al-Daqqaq – may God have mercy on him – say: "As long as he [al-Jurayri] observed good manners [in the presence of] respectable people in his state of listening to the concert, God preserved his moment for him, due to the blessings that accrue from observing good manners. He then said: 'I restrain myself from ecstasy, but when I am alone I give free rein to my ecstasy and behave ecstatically.' However, one cannot give free rein to ecstasy, as one pleases, after the ecstatic moment and its overwhelming powers are gone. This means that as long as he was sincere in his concern for the dignity of the Sufi master, God prolonged his ecstatic moment, so that he could give free rein to his ecstasy when he was alone."

Ecstatic behavior, according to the description just presented, is the beginning of ecstasy, which is followed by ecstasy proper. As for ecstasy, it is something that encounters your heart and descends upon you without any intention or effort on your part. This is why Sufi masters say: "Ecstasy is an encounter [with the mystical moment] and ecstatic acts are the fruits of [supererogatory] prayers. The more one engages in acts of worship, the more divine graces come to one from God."

I heard the master Abu 'Ali al-Daqqaq – may God have mercy on him – say: "Divine visitations (*waridat*) come from prayers (*awrad*). If one does not engage in the prayers on the outside, one will have no divine visitation inside. Every ecstasy that retains some part of the one who experiences it, is not [a true] ecstasy."//124 In the same way as outward pious acts bestow upon the servant of God the sweetness of obedience, his inward experiences bestow ecstatic moments upon him. Therefore, sweetness is the fruit of pious acts, and ecstatic moments are the products of internal experiences."

As for the finding [of God] (*wujud*), it comes after one has raised oneself above ecstasy. The finding of the True Reality⁵¹ can happen only after one's human nature is completely extinguished, for there is no place for it in the presence of the Master of Reality. Abu 'l-Husayn al-Nuri said about this: "For twenty years I have remained between finding and losing. That is, when I found my Lord, I lost my heart, and when I found my heart, I lost my Lord." Al-Junayd's words

49 *Sama'*, lit. "listening [to music]", a Sufi "concert" at which mystical poetry is recited and listened to the accompaniment of musical instruments. It may sometimes involve ecstatic dances or frantic bodily movements. See *IM*, pp. 322–325.

50 Q. 27:90.

51 That is, God.

point to the same meaning: "The knowledge of God's oneness is different from finding Him, and finding Him is different from knowing Him." Some Sufis recited the following verse to this effect:

My finding [of God] is when I am absent from my finding⁵²
Due to the sight that has been revealed to me.

Thus, ecstatic behavior is the beginning; finding is the end, and ecstasy is between the beginning and the end.

I heard the master Abu 'Ali al-Daqqaq say: "Ecstatic behavior engrosses the servant; ecstasy consumes him; and finding annihilates him completely. It is as if one first watches the sea; then plunges into it; then drowns in it. Here is the sequence of this state: aspiration, arrival, witnessing, finding, and extinction. [One's] extinction is commensurate with [one's] finding. The person who experiences finding may have two states: sobriety and annihilation.//125 In the state of sobriety he subsists in God; in the state of annihilation he perishes in God. These two states always follow one upon the other in the mystic's [experience]. When he is overtaken by sobriety in God, he begins to move and speak by and through God.⁵³ The Prophet – peace be upon him – said: "He [man] hears through Me [God] and sees through Me."⁵⁴

I heard Shaykh Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami say: I heard Mansur b. 'Abdallah say: "A man came to the teaching assembly of al-Shibli and asked him: 'Do the signs of true finding appear on those who experience it?' He answered: 'Yes, there is a light that shines through together with the lights of ardent passion [for God]. These lights leave their traces on men's complexions, in accordance with the verses of Ibn al-Mu'tazz⁵⁵:

Water flowed like rain into the cup from a pitcher
And pearls sprang up from the golden floor
All those present sang praise to God, when they saw this wonder:
The light of water in the fire of grapes
A vintage wine that [the people of] 'Ad⁵⁶ had inherited from
[the inhabitants of] Iram⁵⁷
It was a treasure that the Persian kings passed on from father to son.'"

52 Or from "my existence".

53 A reference to the *hadith* quoted in Ahmad b. Hanbal, *Al-Musnad*, vol. 1, pp. 150–151.

54 A reference to the famous *hadith qudsi* – that is, a statement transmitted from the Prophet in which God is the speaker: "When I love him [man], I become his hearing through which he hears, his eyesight through which he sees, his hand through which he holds, and his foot through which he walks." For details, see Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, pp. 325–331.

55 A famous poet and literary critic of the 'Abbasid period, who was murdered in 296/908 as a result of a coup at the 'Abbasid court.

56 An ancient Arabian tribe that, according to the Qur'an, was destroyed for its sins and disobedience of God's commands.

57 An ancient Arabian city that is believed to have been destroyed by God as a punishment for the transgressions of its inhabitants.

Someone once said to Abu Bakr al-Duqqi⁵⁸ that Jahm al-Raqqi had fallen into a trance during a mystical concert. In his excitement, he seized a tree and pulled it up by its roots. Later, both came to the same party. Al-Duqqi was blind. [During the party] Jahm al-Raqqi rose and began to whirl due to the ecstatic state he experienced. Al-Duqqi said: "When he approaches me, give me a sign!" Al-Duqqi was a weak man. In the meantime, al-Raqqi was passing by him. When he drew near, someone said to al-Duqqi: "Here he is!" At that moment al-Duqqi seized al-Raqqi by the ankle and stopped him, so that the man could not move. Jahm cried: "O master, I repent, I repent!" After that [al-Duqqi] let him go. The master and teacher [al-Qushayri] – may God prolong his goodness – said: "Jahm's excitement was right. However, when al-Duqqi seized him by the ankle, he was right too. When al-Raqqi realized that al-Duqqi's state was higher than his own, he returned to the proper conduct and submitted himself [to his superior]. For him who is right, everything is possible."//126

As for the person in whom the state of annihilation prevails, he has neither intellect, nor understanding, nor sensation. I heard Shaykh Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami – may God have mercy on him – say, on the authority of his transmitters, that Abu 'Iqal al-Maghribi lived in Mecca for four years without eating or drinking anything until he passed away. Once, a poor man⁵⁹ came to Abu 'Iqal and said: "Peace be upon you!" He answered: "And upon you be peace!" The man then said: "I am so-and-so." Abu 'Iqal told him: "You are so-and-so. How are you doing? What is happening to you?" And then he fell into unconsciousness. The man related: "I would tell him again: 'Peace be upon you!' and Abu 'Iqal would reply: 'And upon you be peace!' as if he had not just seen me." The man said: "I did this several times, whereupon I realized that this person was unconscious. I then left him alone and departed from his house."

I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn say: I heard that 'Umar b. Muhammad b. Ahmad said: I heard the wife of Abu 'Abdallah al-Tarwaghandi say: "In the days of hunger, when people were dying of starvation, Abu 'Abdallah al-Tarwaghandi entered his house and saw there two *manns*⁶⁰ of wheat. He screamed: 'People are starving, while I have wheat in my house!' As a result, he lost his mind and did not come to his senses except during the times of the prayer. He would pray the obligatory prayer and then return to his [disorderly] mental state. He remained in this state until his death."

This story shows that the requirements of the Divine Law were preserved for this man regardless of his being under the sway of the commands pertaining to the True Reality.⁶¹ This is a sign of the people of the True Reality.⁶² The reason for his absence from mental discernment was his compassion for fellow

58 A Sufi of Baghdad, who died around 366/977.

59 That is, a Sufi.

60 A measure of weight equal to two pounds.

61 *Al-haqiqah*, that is the Divine Absolute.

62 That is, the accomplished Sufi gnostics.

Muslims, which is the best sign that he had achieved perfection in his mystical state.

Unification (*jam'*) and separation (*farq*)

The expressions “unification” and “separation” are often mentioned in their [Sufi] discourses. Our master Abu 'Ali al-Daqqaq used to say: “Separation is something that is attributed to you; unification, on the other hand, is something that is taken from you.”//127 He meant that whatever the servant of God acquires by means of fulfilling the requirements of his servitude and by means of his status as a human being is separation. As for unification, it is everything that comes from the Real, such as the bringing forth of new entities and the bestowal of grace and favor [upon humans]. These are the minimal requirements for the states of unity and separation, because they⁶³ continue to take notice of their deeds. When God – may He be exalted – allows a person to continue to take notice of his acts of obedience and disobedience, this person finds himself in a state of separation. When, on the other hand, God – may He be blessed – allows a person to see His own deeds, this person acquires the attribute of unification. Thus the assertion of the created world belongs to separation, whereas the assertion of the Real is an attribute of unification.

There is no escape for the servant of God from both unification and separation, for he who does not have separation cannot achieve perfect servitude and he who does not have unification has no knowledge [of God]. God's words [in the Qur'an] “Thee only we serve”⁶⁴ point to separation, while His words “To Thee alone we have recourse”⁶⁵ point to unification. When the servant of God addresses Him – may He be exalted – in his intimate conversation with Him as a beggar, a supplicant, a lauder, a giver of thanks, a renouncer [of evil deeds], or a humble beseecher, he places himself in the position of separation. And when he listens in his inner self to what his Lord tells him and hears in his heart what God imparts to him by calling upon him, admonishing him, instructing him, or intimating [something] to his heart and willing him to follow [this intimation], he finds himself under the sign of unification.

I heard Abu 'Ali al-Daqqaq – may God have mercy on him – say: “A singer recited the following verses before Master Abu Sahl al-Su'uki – may God have mercy on him:

I have made my vision of You my [greatest] pleasure!

Abu 'l-Qasim al-Nasrabadhi – may God have mercy on him – was there at that time. Master Abu Sahl said: ““Made” should be read in the second person.”⁶⁶

63 That is, those who experience these states.

64 Q. 1:4.

65 Q. 1:4.

66 That is, “You [God] have made my vision of You my greatest pleasure.”

Al-Nasrabadhi said: 'No, it should be read in the first person!' Master Abu Sahl then asked: 'Isn't the essence of unification more complete?'⁶⁷ Al-Nasrabadhi fell silent."

I heard that Shaykh Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami interpreted this story in the same way [as Abu Sahl].//128 The meaning of this is as follows. When someone says "made" in the first person, it means that the speaker speaks about the state of his own self, as if the servant of God implies that this action comes from him. As for the one who says that "made" should be in the second person, he absolves himself from any deliberate action and says to his Lord: "It is You Who have distinguished me with this [quality], and not I by means of my own deliberate action!" The first [interpretation] contains the danger of [an egoistic] claim, whereas the second implies the denial of one's free power [to act] and the assertion of [God's] beneficence and generosity. There is a great difference between the one who says: "I worship You through my own [free] effort" and the one who says: "I witness You through Your beneficence and kindness."

The unification of unification (*jam' al-jam'*)

The unification of unification is higher than this. People differ on this issue according to the differences in their spiritual states and in their ranks [of spiritual attainment]. When someone reasserts both himself and the created world, yet sees everything [in this world] as being dependent on God, this is unification. When, on the other hand, through the appearance and under the complete domination of the power of the Divine Reality one is rendered incapable of contemplating the created world, barred from one's own self, and taken in one's entirety from sensing anything else, this is the unification of unification.

Thus, separation is seeing something other than God – may He be great and exalted; unification is seeing everything through [the eyes of] God; and the unification of unification is total self-dissolution [in God] and the loss of perception of anything other than God – may He be great and exalted – as a result of the onslaught of the irresistible powers of the Divine Reality.

After this comes the lofty state that the Sufis call "second separation" (*farq thani*). In this state, the servant of God returns to sobriety whenever he must perform any of his religious duties so that he can fulfill his religious obligations in their proper times. This is a return to God – the most high – through God, not to the servant through the servant. In this state, the servant sees himself being driven by God's will – may He be exalted. He sees God's power as the ultimate source of his essence and his self; he sees God's knowledge and will as the true performer of his actions and the originator of his spiritual states. By the phrase "unification and separation" some Sufis imply that creatures are subject to the dispositions of the Divine Reality.//129 He has united everything under His

67 Abu Sahl's interpretation shows God to be the ultimate agent, whereas al-Nasrabadhi's interpretation leaves room for the human agent to exercise his free will.

power and disposal, since He is the Originator of their essences and the Determiner of their attributes. He has then divided them into several classes. Some of them [are destined] to be among the blessed, others [are destined] to be far removed from Him and to be among the wretched; some of them He will guide aright, others He will lead astray and make blind; some of them He will veil from Himself, others He will draw near; some of them He will make His intimates by allowing them to join Him, others He will make despair of His mercy; some of them He will grant His assistance, others He will frustrate in their aspirations to realize His true essence; some of them He will keep sober, others He will obliterate;⁶⁸ some of them He will draw nigh, others He will make absent [from themselves]; some of them He brings into His presence, makes them drink and intoxicates them, others He renders miserable and rejects, then banishes and expels. One cannot count all the varieties of His actions, nor can they be exhausted by any explanation and enumeration. They [Sufis] recite the following verses by al-Junayd – may God have mercy on him – about the meaning of unification and separation:

I have attained a true realization of You in my innermost
Heart and I conversed with You with my own tongue.
We were united in one sense and separated in the other.
At one moment my awe [of You] makes me absent from
Seeing You directly,
Yet at the next moment my ecstasy makes You close to my very core!

They [Sufis] also recite the following:

When He appears to me, nothing seems greater to me than He
Then I return to the original state as if I never left it.
I become unified and dispersed from myself through Him,
For two numbers can join to become a singular one.

Annihilation (*fana'*) and subsistence (*baqa'*) [in God]

By “annihilation” the Sufis refer to the disappearance of blameworthy qualities, whereas by “subsistence” they refer to the persistence of praiseworthy qualities. The servant of God cannot but have one of these two types [of qualities], for it is well known that if he does not have one type, he will inevitably have the other. When his blameworthy qualities are annihilated, he will possess praiseworthy ones. Likewise, when he is dominated by blameworthy characteristics, he will be deprived of praiseworthy ones.

Know that the servant of God is characterized by deeds, morals and spiritual states. Deeds are what he undertakes of his own free will. //130 Morals are his inherent predispositions, which, however, can be changed through continual

68 That is, He will deprive them of their self-consciousness by having them contemplate His majesty.

exercises. Spiritual states come to the servant from the outset. However, their subsequent purity is determined only by the cleanness of his actions. In this respect they are similar to morals. God allows the person whose heart preoccupies itself with morals through its own [concerted] effort and banishes from it any reprehensible qualities to improve his morals. Likewise, God will allow the person who strives to purify his deeds of his own accord to purify and protect his spiritual states.

When someone abandons the evil deeds denounced by the Divine Law, it is said that he is annihilated from his passions. And when he is annihilated from his passions, he subsists in the service of God through his determination and sincerity. When someone renounces this world, it is said that he is annihilated from his desire [of it]. And when he is annihilated from his desire of it, he subsists in the sincerity of his repentance. When someone has refined his morals by cleansing his heart of envy, malice, avarice, greed, anger, and pride, as well as any other impurities that adhere to the soul, it is said: "He has been annihilated from the base character traits." And when one is annihilated from bad morals, one subsists in chivalry and truthfulness.

When one observes the workings of divine power in the vicissitudes of divine decrees, it is said that one has been annihilated from seeing events as emanating from creatures. And when one is annihilated from perceiving events as products of secondary causes,⁶⁹ one subsists in the attributes of the Real.

When the power of the True Reality takes possession of someone, he no longer notices the essences, effects, traces or vestiges of anything other than God. They say of such a person: "He has been annihilated from [God's] creatures and now subsists in God."

The servant of God is annihilated from his blameworthy deeds and base states when he does not perform them, and he is annihilated from his own self and from all creatures when he ceases to perceive both them and himself. When he is annihilated from deeds, morals, and spiritual states, all this no longer exists for him. One can say that someone has been annihilated from himself and from all creatures, yet [in reality] his self and the creatures continue to exist. However, he has no knowledge, perception or sign of them. His self exists and the creatures continue to exist [objectively]. However, he is oblivious of them and is capable of perceiving neither his self nor the creatures.

Imagine, for example, that a man enters into the presence of a mighty ruler or a highly revered person and becomes so self-effaced in his reverence that he forgets about both himself and the other people//131 in the assembly, including the revered individual himself. When he would emerge from the assembly and be asked about the people there and the behavior of the revered individual and about his own behavior, he would not be able to say anything about that. God said: "And when they saw him [Joseph], they so admired him that they cut their hands."⁷⁰

69 That is, one begins to see God as the sole cause of all created things.

70 Q. 12:31.

When they⁷¹ met Joseph – upon him be peace – they took no notice at all of the pain from cutting their hands, although they were more feeble than men. They said: “This is no mortal”,⁷² while he [in fact] was mortal. They said: “He is none other than a noble angel”,⁷³ while he [in fact] was not an angel. And this is the state of [one group of] creatures meeting another creature. You can only imagine the man to whom the sight of God – glory be to Him – were disclosed! If he were to lose the sense of himself and his fellow human beings, would there be any surprise in that?

When a man is annihilated from his ignorance, he subsists in his knowledge and when he is annihilated from his passions, he subsists in his repentance. When he is annihilated from his desire [of this world], he persists in its renunciation. When he is annihilated from his passionate drive, he subsists in his longing for God. This is true of all human characteristics. After the servant of God is annihilated from his characteristics, as we have just described, he advances from this stage [to the next one] at which he loses sight of his annihilation. This is described by a Sufi poet, who said:

Some people wander across the land by the desert
While others wander in the arena of His love
Annihilate yourselves thrice,
Then subsist close to the Lord!

The first annihilation is from one's self and one's attributes through subsistence in the attributes of God. Then comes the annihilation from the attributes of God in the contemplation of God. Then one is annihilated from the vision of one's own annihilation by being subsumed in the existence of God Himself. //132

Absence (*ghayba*) and presence (*hudur*)

Absence is when the heart is absent from knowing the circumstances of creatures due to the complete absorption of the senses by what has appeared to it [from God]. One may also become absent from oneself and others through remembering [God's] promise of reward and thinking of [God's] punishment. It is said that Rabi' b. Khuthaym⁷⁴ used to visit Ibn Mas'ud⁷⁵ – may God be pleased with him. As he was passing by a blacksmith's shop, he saw a red-hot iron in the oven and fainted, and did not come to until the next morning. When he woke up, he was asked about what had happened. He answered: “I remembered how the people of hellfire will sojourn in the fire!” This was an absence that went beyond its limit and turned into a swoon.

71 That is, the female guests of Potiphar's wife.

72 Q. 12:32.

73 Q. 12:32.

74 An early Muslim (d. 61/680 or somewhat later), who belonged to the generation of those who came after the Companions of the Prophet.

75 'Abdallah b. Mas'ud (d. 32/652), an early convert to Islam who was renowned for his expertise on the Qur'an, which he was writing down directly from the Prophet. He resided in Kufa.

It is recounted of 'Ali b. al-Husayn⁷⁶ that he was performing a ritual prayer when suddenly his house caught fire. However, he did not interrupt his prayer. When asked about that, he said: "The Greatest Fire⁷⁷ made me oblivious of that fire." Occasionally, a man can be rendered absent from his [self-]perception by something that God – may He be blessed and exalted – reveals to him.

Those who experience absence differ from one another according to their spiritual states. It is well known that the spiritual state⁷⁸ of Abu Hafs al-Nisaburi al-Haddad (The "Blacksmith") began when he gave up his profession. He was in his smithy when he heard someone reciting a verse from the Qur'an. At that moment, he had an experience that made him oblivious of his senses. He put his hand into the fire and took out a piece of red-hot iron. His apprentice saw this and cried: "What is this, master?!" When Abu Hafs realized what had just happened, he gave up his trade and left his smithy [for good].

Once, as al-Junayd was sitting together with his wife, al-Shibli entered the room.⁷⁹ The wife hurried to cover herself, but al-Junayd said to her: "Sit still, for al-Shibli is unaware of you!" Al-Junayd conversed with al-Shibli for a while, until the latter broke into tears. When he began to cry, al-Junayd said to his wife: "Cover yourself now, for al-Shibli has come to!"

I heard Abu Nasr the Muezzin (al-Mu'adhdhin) of Nishapur, who was a pious man, say: "I was reading the Qur'an at the session of Master Abu 'Ali al-Daqqaq at Nishapur, when he was residing there. He used to talk a lot about the *haji*, and his words left a deep imprint in my heart. When I went on a *haji* that year, I abandoned my store//133 and my trade. Master Abu 'Ali al-Daqqaq – may God have mercy on him – also went on a *haji* that same year. When he was living in Nishapur I used to serve him and to attend study sessions at his house. [As I was on my way to Mecca], I saw him in the desert. After he had performed his ablution, he forgot the bottle he used to carry with him. I picked it up and carried it with me. When he resumed his journey, I gave it to him. He said: 'May God reward you for bringing it!' He looked at me for a while, as if he had not seen me before, then said: 'I have seen you once. Who are you?' I answered: 'May God be my helper! I was your companion for many years. I left my home and my possessions because of you, and journeyed in the barren desert together with you, and now you tell that you have seen me once!'"

As for presence, it is when someone is present with God, for when he is absent from creatures, he enters into the presence of God, in the sense that he is present with Him. This is due to the fact that the recollection of God takes full possession of his heart and he finds his heart to be present with God Most High.

76 'Ali b. al-Husayn b. 'Ali b. Abi Talib (d. around 92/710), nicknamed "Zayn al-'Abidin", a grandson of the Prophet through the line of his daughter Fatima and his cousin 'Ali; the fourth *imam* of the Shi'ites.

77 That is, the fire of Hell.

78 That is, conversion to the path of asceticism and mysticism.

79 See above, pp. 61–62.

Someone's presence with God corresponds to the level of his absence from creatures. When he is completely absent [from creatures] his presence is complete. When they say that someone is present, this means that his heart is present with God, without being neglectful or forgetful [of Him], and constantly remembering Him. In his presence, God – may He be blessed and exalted – will unveil to him things that He has prepared for him and for him only.

Sometimes Sufis describe the servant's return to self-awareness and to awareness of other creatures as his "presence", meaning that he has returned from his absence [from creatures] to his presence with creatures, after he was present with God.

Their states in absence may vary. The absence of some does not last, whereas the absence of others may last for a while. It is said that Dhu 'l-Nun al-Misri sent one of his companions to Abu Yazid al-Bistami, so that he [the companion] would give him a description of Abu Yazid. When the companion reached the city of Bistam, he asked about the house of Abu Yazid. When he entered the house, Abu Yazid asked him what he wanted. He answered: "I am looking for Abu Yazid al-Bistami." Abu Yazid answered: "Who is Abu Yazid? Where is Abu Yazid? I myself am in search of Abu Yazid." The companion left [Abu Yazid's house], saying: "This is a madman!" He returned to Dhu 'l-Nun and told him about what he had seen. [On hearing this] Dhu 'l-Nun began to cry and said: "My brother Abu Yazid has joined those who travel to God."//134

Sobriety (*sahw*) and drunkenness (*sukr*)

Sobriety is returning to self-consciousness after absence [in God]. Drunkenness is absence [from one's self] through a strong experience [of God]. In a sense, drunkenness is a complement to absence in that the drunken person may be relaxed as long as he is not fully immersed in his drunken state. On the other hand, in this state, any perception of outward things may completely disappear from his heart. This is the state of one who behaves like a drunk, because his drunkenness has not yet taken full control of him and he is still capable of perceiving outward things. At some point, his drunkenness may become so strong that it surpasses [the state of] absence. When the drunkenness of a drunk becomes really strong, his absence may surpass the absence experienced by someone in the state of absence. At the same time, the absence of someone in the state of absence may be more complete than the absence of a drunk, especially when he behaves like a drunk without actually having achieved the state of drunkenness.

The state of absence may visit devotees whose hearts have become preoccupied by the influence of passionate longing [for God] and awe [before Him] as well as by the dictates of fear [of God] and hope [for His mercy]. On the contrary, drunkenness is experienced only by those wont to experience ecstatic states. When the attributes of [God's] beauty are revealed to someone, he experiences the state of drunkenness: his spirit rejoices and his heart becomes intoxicated. Of this state the following poetic verses are recited:

Your sobriety from my words is a complete reunion,
 Whereas your drunkenness when you contemplate me permits
 you to indulge in drinking.
 Neither the cup-bearer nor the drunkard get tired of the wine of
 contemplation, each cup of which makes your heart drunk.

They [Sufis] also recite the following verse:

The circling of the cup makes some people drunk,
 While I get drunk from the one who passes it around.

They also recite:

I have two states of intoxication, while my boon companions have only
 one.
 This is what makes me different from them.

They also recite:

There are two kinds of drunkenness: the drunkenness of passion
 and the drunkenness of wine.
 How can a man who has tasted either of them ever come to his senses

Know that one's sobriety corresponds to one's drunkenness. He who experiences true drunkenness, enjoys true sobriety.//135 And he whose drunkenness is mixed with good fortune, experiences a sobriety that is also mixed with good fortune. He who has been truthful in his state [of sobriety] is protected in his drunkenness. Both drunkenness and sobriety imply distinction.⁸⁰ However, when one becomes witness to the Power of the Real, one loses one's personal attributes and becomes fully consumed and overwhelmed by it. Of this state it is said:

When the morning appears to the star of old wine
 The drunk and the sober will become equal.

God Most High said: "And when his Lord revealed Himself to the mountain, He made it crumble to dust; and Moses fell down swooning."⁸¹ He "fell down swooning" in spite of his prophethood and his great stature [as a messenger of God], while the mountain "crumbled to dust" in spite of its superior firmness and strength.

In his state of drunkenness the servant of God finds himself under the mark of a [mystical] state, whereas in his state of sobriety he is under the mark of knowledge. In his state of drunkenness he is protected by God without applying his own effort, while in his state of sobriety he protects himself [from error] through his own actions.

Sobriety and drunkenness come after tasting and drinking.

80 That is, in these states one remains aware of the diversity of the surrounding world.

81 Q. 7:139.

Tasting (*dhawq*) and drinking (*shurb*)

Among the words that they⁸² use are “tasting” and “drinking”. They use these words to describe the fruits of God’s self-manifestation, the results of God’s self-unveiling and God’s unexpected visitations, which they experience. The first of these is tasting, then comes drinking and, finally, the quenching of thirst (*riyy*).//136

They attain the taste of [true] meanings through the purity of their pious deeds; they attain the drinking [of true meanings] through fulfilling the requirements of their spiritual stations; and they quench their thirst [for true meanings] through their constant search for God’s presence. The person in the state of tasting is behaving like a drunk; the person in the state of drinking is drunk; the person who has quenched his thirst is sober.

When someone’s love [of God] is strong, his state of drinking becomes permanent. And when it becomes permanent, his drinking does not make him drunk. He then becomes sober in God and oblivious of all his [mundane] concerns; he is neither influenced by anything that comes to him [in the empirical world], nor is he changed from the state in which he is now. When one’s innermost heart is pure, one’s drinking is safe from any taint; and when one’s drinking becomes one’s nourishment, one can neither abstain from it, nor survive without it.

They recite:

The cup [of wine] is like the mother’s milk to us
If we cannot taste it, we cannot survive.

They also recite:

I am surprised when someone says: “I have remembered God.”
How can I forget, so that I have to remember what I have forgotten?
I have drunk love one cup after another
But although wine does not run out, I cannot quench my thirst for it.

It is said that Yahya b. Mu‘adh wrote to Abu Yazid al-Bistami: “Here’s the one⁸³ who has drunk from the cup of love and will never feel thirst again.” Abu Yazid responded to him: “I am surprised at the weakness of your [spiritual] state! Here’s a man who has gulped down all the seas of existence, yet his mouth is agape, wanting more.”

Know that the cups of closeness [to God] appear from the Unseen and are bestowed only upon those whose hearts are emancipated and whose spirits are free from attachment to the things [of this world].

82 That is, the Sufis.

83 That is, himself.

Erasure (*mahw*) and affirmation (*ithbat*)

Erasure is the removal of habitual attributes and affirmation is the fulfillment of the commands of servanthood.//137 When someone has removed blameworthy qualities from his internal states and replaced them with praiseworthy states and actions, he becomes a man of erasure and affirmation.

I heard that master Abu 'Ali al-Daqqaq – may God have mercy on him – said that one Sufi shaykh asked someone [who was discussing erasure and affirmation]: “What do you erase and what do you assert?” The speaker fell silent. [Abu 'Ali] then said: “Don't you know that the mystical moment is both erasure and affirmation? He who has neither erasure nor affirmation is idle and abandoned.” Erasure can be of several types: the erasure of faults from one's externals; the removal of forgetfulness from one's internal self; the removal of deficiency from one's innermost heart. The erasure of faults is the affirmation of good deeds; the erasure of forgetfulness is the affirmation of spiritual stations [with God]; and the erasure of deficiency is the affirmation of joining [God]. This is erasure and affirmation in the meaning of servitude. As regards the true erasure and affirmation, they come from [God's] power – that is, erasure is that which God conceals and denies, whereas affirmation is that which He shows and makes manifest. Erasure and affirmation are determined by the divine will, because God Most High said: “God erases and affirms what He wills.”⁸⁴ It is said that God erases from the hearts of the gnostics any thought of other than Himself and He affirms the remembrance of Himself on His servants' tongues. God erases and affirms for each one in accordance with his internal state. When God – may He be exalted – erases someone's self-perception, He affirms him through His own True Self. When He erases someone's affirmation [through His True Self], He returns him to the vision of other things and settles him in the plains of differentiation.⁸⁵

Someone asked al-Shibli – may God have mercy on him: “Why do I always see you being restless? Isn't He with you and aren't you with Him?” Al-Shibli answered://138 “When I am with Him, I am. However, I am erased in Him!” Obliteration is above erasure, because erasure leaves a trace, while obliteration leaves no trace whatsoever. The ultimate goal of the folk⁸⁶ is when God obliterates their self-perception completely, never to return them to themselves.

Concealment (*satr*) and [self-]manifestation (*tajalli*)

The ordinary folk are covered by concealment, whereas the elect are witnessing the permanent self-manifestation [of God]. A report from the Prophet says: “When God manifests Himself to something, it submits to Him.” If someone experiences concealment, his self-perception is determined by it, while a person in the state of manifestation is always characterized by submission. Concealment

84 Q. 13:39.

85 That is, things other than God.

86 That is, the Sufis.

is a punishment for the ordinary folk and a blessing for the elect. If He did not protect from them what He unveils to them, they would have been completely annihilated by the power of the True Reality. However, He manifests Himself to them, while at the same time concealing Himself from them. I heard that al-Mansur al-Maghribi said: "A poor man came to the camp of a Bedouin tribe. A youth [of the tribe] invited him to his tent. As the youth was serving him [some food], he suddenly fainted. The poor man asked about that. The Bedouin told him: He has a female cousin, whom he loves. As she was entering her tent, the youth saw the dust stirred by the hem of her robe and fell unconscious. The poor man came to the door of the cousin's tent and said: '[I know] that a stranger among you is under your protection. Thus [as a stranger] I have come to speak to you on behalf of this youth, because I feel pity for him being in such a state on account of you.' She answered: 'Good Lord! What a naïve man you are! He cannot endure the sight of the dust raised by my clothes! How can he endure my company?!'"

The ordinary Sufis experience happiness at [divine] self-manifestation and suffer when they experience [divine] self-concealment. As for the elect ones, they vacillate between recklessness and happiness, because when God appears to them they become reckless. However, when He conceals Himself from them, they come to and feel happy. //139

They say that God Most High told Moses – peace be upon him: "What is that, Moses, that thou hast in thy right hand?"⁸⁷, thereby distracting him with something that pleased him [in order to lessen] the impact of [divine] unveiling, when God spoke to him. The Prophet – may God bless and greet him – said: "My heart remains covered by a veil as long as I have asked God's pardon seventy times a day." Asking for God's pardon (*istighfar*) means asking God to veil Himself, because the word *ghafr* also means "veil". This is similar to such expressions as "to cover [oneself] with clothing" (*ghafr al-thawb*) and "protective covering" (*mighfar*).⁸⁸ It seems that the Prophet was saying that he sought to cover his heart against the onslaught of the True Reality, because creatures cannot survive in the presence of the Real. According to the prophetic report, "Should God unveil His face, the splendor of His countenance would burn everything within the range of His sight."

Presence (*muhadara*), unveiling (*mukashafa*) and witnessing (*mushahada*)

Presence comes first, then unveiling, then witnessing. Presence is the presence of the heart [with God]. It can be achieved through a continuous manifestation of the [divine] proof, during which a person finds himself in [God's] presence through the power of recollection [of God]. This [state] is followed by unveiling, which is presence through clear evidence. In this state one need not see the

87 Q 20:17.

88 This word may also mean "helmet".

[divine] proof or seek the path. One is neither subject to the promptings of doubt, nor veiled from the realm of the Unseen.⁸⁹ This [state] is followed by witnessing. This means to be in the presence of the Absolute Truth,⁹⁰ where there is no room for doubt.//140 When the sky of the innermost heart is free from the clouds of veiling, the sun of witnessing begins to shine from the zodiacal sign of nobility. The True Reality of witnessing was captured by al-Junayd – may God have mercy on him – when he said: “God’s existence appears when you lose yours.”

The person in the state of presence is bound by its signs; the person in the state of unveiling rejoices in its attributes. As for the person in the state of witnessing, his self is erased by his knowledge [of God].

No one has expressed the essence of witnessing better than ‘Amr b. ‘Uthman al-Makki – may God have mercy on him – when he said that the lights of God’s self-manifestation appear to the heart clearly and without interruption. It is like an uninterrupted sequence of lightning in the middle of a dark night: when it occurs, the lightning turns the night into day. The same happens to the heart, when divine self-manifestation descends upon it continuously: it lives in the light of day with no night. Sufis recite the following poetry:

My night is lit by your face, whereas its darkness encompasses other people
Therefore the people wander in the darkness, whereas we bask in the light
of day.

Al-Nuri said: “One cannot attain true witnessing as long as a single living⁹¹ vein remains in one’s body.” He also said: “When dawn breaks, one no longer needs a lamp.”

Some Sufis argue that witnessing implies some sort of separation, because the form of the verbal noun upon which it is patterned – that is, *mufa‘ala* – implies [an action that involves] two subjects. These people are in error, because when the Creator appears, His creatures cease to exist. Besides, not every verbal noun patterned on *mufa‘ala* necessarily implies [the presence of] two subjects – for instance, “he traveled” (*safar*) or “he sewed another sole upon the sole” (*taraqa al-na‘l*), and so on.

Sufis recite the following poetry:

When the dawn breaks, the light of its glow eliminates the light of the
stars above.

It forces them to swill yet another cup [of wine] the strength of which is
such that were it to be swallowed by a raging flame it would disappear
momentarily.

89 That is, the realm of divine mystery that contains the knowledge of the future.

90 *Al-haqq*. This word often designates God.

91 Lit. “standing”.

What a marvelous cup this is! It removes them from their own selves, it annihilates them, it steals them from themselves and makes them disappear without any trace! What a cup! "It spares not, neither leaves alone."⁹² It obliterated them completely, leaving in them not a sliver of human nature, as in a poem:

They departed, leaving behind neither a sign nor trace.

Glimmers (*lawā'ih*), dawnings (*tawālī'*) and flashes (*lawamī'*)

The master⁹³ – may God be pleased with him – said that these words have a similar meaning. They differ very little from one another. They are characteristic of beginners who strive to ascend by their hearts. For them, these rays of the suns of divine knowledge do not last long. God provides nourishment for their hearts at every moment, according to His words: "They shall have their provision at dawn and evening."⁹⁴ Each time the firmament of their hearts is obscured by the clouds of selfishness, the glimmers of unveiling and the flashes of closeness [to God] begin to shine in them; and amidst veiling they suddenly begin to see the glimmers [of divine grace]. A poet said:

O blazing lightning! What quarter of the sky will you shine from?

At first there are glimmers, then dawnings, then flashes. The glimmers are like lightning in that they disappear as soon as they appear. A poet said:

We have not seen each other for a long time, but when
we finally met his greeting was like saying "farewell".

Sufis also recite the following verse:

O you, who have come to visit and yet have not visited,
Like a man seeking to take some fire,
Who passed by the door of the house in a hurry.
What it was that prevented him from coming in?

Flashes are brighter than glimmers and they last longer. Flashes can persist for more than one moment, however, as they say://142

The eye is weeping because seeing cannot satisfy it.

They also say:

The eye is hardly able to reach the water of his face
without first choking on its guardian before its thirst is quenched.

92 Q. 74:28.

93 That is, al-Qushayri, whose words were probably recorded by his disciples, who later integrated them into the final version of his book.

94 Q. 19:63.

When it appears to you in a flash, it severs you from yourself and unites you with Him. However, no sooner than the light of its day has shone, it is attacked by the warriors of night. The people [in this state] are [oscillating] between joy and sorrow, because they [find themselves] between veiling and unveiling. They say [about this state]:

The night has enveloped us with its noblest cloak,
While the morning clad us with its golden gown.

Dawnings are longer in duration, are stronger [in their effect], and last longer. They are better in lifting darkness and banishing doubts, yet they are also susceptible to the danger of setting, lower in apogee and of shorter duration. They are quick to depart and take longer to reappear after they have set.

The characteristics of all these experiences – that is, glimmers, dawnings, and flashes – vary. Some of them leave no trace after their disappearance, like some bright stars, which eclipse, while the night stays on. Others, on the contrary, leave traces behind them. While their signs may disappear, their pain persists. Their light may be gone, while their traces remain. A person who has experienced their onslaught continues to live in the shade of their blessings. He is living in anticipation of their return, making do with what he has.

[Unexpected] raids (*bawadih*) and attacks (*hujum*)

Raids are things that descend instantaneously upon your heart from [the realm of] the unknown. They may cause either joy or sadness.//143

As for attacks, they are things that enter your heart due to the power of the moment,⁹⁵ without any effort on your part. They vary in their nature according to the strength or weakness of the experience [that precipitates it].

There are those who are changed by [their] raids and act according to the dictates of [their] attacks. And there are those whose spiritual state and power put them above anything that may befall to them. Such people are the masters of the moment. Of them it is said:

The vicissitudes of time cannot find their way to them
For they are the ones who hold the reins of every great affair.

Inconstancy (*talwin*) and stability (*tamkin*)

Inconstancy is an attribute of those [who have] spiritual states, whereas stability is a characteristic of those who have attained true realities.

As long as a man travels along the [mystical] path, he experiences inconstancy, because he continues to rise from one state to another and move from one attribute to another; he leaves one place for another, but once he has arrived, he becomes stable.

95 See Chapter 2, pp. 75–77.

They say:

I have settled down in my love of you at a station
Which bewilders the hearts of those who have not yet attained it.

The person in the state of inconstancy is continually on the increase, while the one in the state of stability has arrived at his goal and become united [with it]. The sign of his becoming united is that his entire self no longer takes account of itself.

One of the Sufi masters said: "The journey of those who have sought to conquer their egos has ended. When they have conquered their egos, they have arrived [at their goal]."

The master⁹⁶ – may God have mercy on him – said: "He meant that [they] leave behind [their] human characteristics and enter the realm of the True Reality. If this state persists in someone, he has achieved stability."

The master Abu 'Ali al-Daqqaq – may God have mercy on him – used to say: "Moses – may God bless him – was characterized by inconstancy. When he returned after hearing the words of God, he had to cover his face, // 144 because he was so strongly affected by [his] spiritual state. As for our Prophet – may God bless and greet him – he was characterized by stability. When he returned [from his journey],⁹⁷ he was the same as when he had left, because he was not affected by anything he had seen during that night. Other evidence of this is the story of Joseph – peace be upon him. The women who saw Joseph – peace be upon him – cut their hands when he came out to them because his appearance was so sudden. As for the wife of al-'Aziz,⁹⁸ she turned out to be more perfect than them when tested by Joseph. On that day not a single hair of hers was unsettled [by his presence], because she had attained stability through her [earlier] encounter with Joseph – peace be upon him.

The master [al-Qushayri] said: "Know that a person undergoes change as a result of an experience that visits him for two different reasons – namely, the strength of the experience or the weakness of the person. [Likewise,] a person's stability is due to two reasons – namely, the person's strength or the weakness of the experience that visits him."

I heard that the master Abu 'Ali al-Daqqaq – may God have mercy on him – said: Sufis take two principal approaches to the possibility of the persistence of stability [in a person]. First, it is absolutely unattainable, because the Prophet – may God bless and greet him – said: "Had you always remained in the same condition in which you were when I was with you, the angels would surely greet you."⁹⁹ He

96 That is, al-Qushayri.

97 Probably from the Prophet's night journey and ascension to heaven (*al-isra' wa 'l-mi'raj*), during which he contemplated God from the distance of "two bows'-lengths or nearer". See Q. 53:1–12.

98 The name of Biblical Potiphar in the Muslim tradition.

99 Ahmad b. Hanbal, *Al-Musnad*, vol. 4, p. 346.

– may God greet and bless him – said to the same effect: “I have a moment in which only God finds any room in me.” He thus mentioned only a specific point [not a constant condition]. According to the second view, in the people of true realities states can persist for a long while because they have advanced beyond the condition in which they are affected by unexpected experiences. [The Prophet] said in his report, “The angels would surely greet you.” He thereby did not predicate [his statement] on an impossible condition, for the greeting of angels is inferior to that which he – peace be upon him – ascribed to beginners in the following report: “Verily, the angels lower//145 their wings for [every] seeker of knowledge out of contentment with what he is doing.”¹⁰⁰

As for his saying “I have a moment”, its meaning differs according to the understanding of each listener. For the Prophet maintained the truth in all his states.

It is more appropriate to say that a man is subject to inconstancy as long as he progresses toward his goal; his states may increase or decrease. And when he has finally arrived at the True Reality by leaving behind the properties of humanity, God – may He be exalted – makes him stable and prevents him from retreating to the weakness of his self. He thus becomes stable in his state in accordance with his position and with that which he has deserved. Then God – may He be exalted – begins to bestow upon him gifts incessantly, for His possibilities are unlimited. Thus, a mystic whose states are on the increase, is inconstant, or rather he is rendered inconstant [by God], while at its core his spiritual state remains stable. He is continually becoming stable in a state that is higher than the one he has occupied before. He then rises above it to a new state, for God’s possibilities have no limit in all respects.

Finally, there are those who have lost awareness of themselves and whose senses have been taken from them in their entirety, for human nature of necessity has a limit. If such a person has abandoned his body, soul and self-perception, as well as his perception of the created world around him, and if his self-oblivion becomes permanent, he becomes erased – that is, for him, there exists neither stability nor inconstancy, neither a [mystical] stage, nor a [mystical] state. And as long as he remains in this condition, he is exempt from worship and [religious] obligations. O Lord, may he be ascribed the things that seem to be done by him, without him actually doing them. In people’s minds, such a person is acting on his own, while in fact he is acted upon [by God].

God – may He be exalted – said: “Thou wouldst have thought them awake, as they lay sleeping, while We turned them now to the right, now to the left.”¹⁰¹ May God grant success!

100 Ahmad b. Hanbal, *Al-Musnad*, vol. 4, p. 239.

101 Q. 18:18; 18:17, according to Arberry’s translation.

Proximity (*qurb*) and distance (*bu'd*)

The first degree of proximity is the proximity to obedience toward God and the state of being always engaged in His worship. As for distance, this means to be sullied by the violation of His will and to be removed from obeying Him.//146 The first degree of distance is distance from Godspeed, which is followed by the distance from attainment. In other words, distance from Godspeed means distance from attainment. The Prophet – may God bless and greet him – said that God – blessings be upon Him – said: “[My servant] draws near Me through nothing more than that which I have made obligatory for him. My servant never ceases drawing nearer to Me through supererogatory works until he loves Me and I love him. Then, when I love him, I become his sight and hearing through which he hears and sees ...”¹⁰²

The proximity of the servant [to God] begins with [his] proximity to the faith in God and the attestation of His veracity. This is followed by the proximity to good deeds and the realization [of the Divine Truth]. As for God’s proximity [to His servant], it is the divine knowledge that God bestows upon him today and the contemplation and witnessing [of Himself] that He will grant him in the world to come. It is also various expressions of kindness and beneficence that God will bestow [upon the servant] between now and then.

The servant’s proximity to God is impossible unless he distances himself from His creatures. This applies to the conditions of hearts, not to outward phenomena and [empirical] existence. God’s proximity through knowledge and power encompasses the entire human race.¹⁰³ God’s proximity through kindness and help is limited to the believers. God’s proximity through special intimacy is restricted to His friends. God – may He be exalted – said: “We are nearer to him [man] than the jugular vein.”¹⁰⁴ God – may He be exalted – said: “We are nigher him than you”.¹⁰⁵ God – may He be exalted – also said: “He is with you wherever you are.”¹⁰⁶ He also said: “Three men conspire not secretly together, but He is the fourth of them.”¹⁰⁷

He who has fully realized proximity to God, observes every single thing that comes to him from God, because watching over him is the guardian of the fear [of God], over whom is the guardian of reverence, over whom is the guardian of humility. They [Sufis] recite the following poetry:

102 For a full version of this “sacred hadith” (*hadith qudsi*) and its implications for Sufi theory and practice, see Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, pp. 325–331; cf. idem., *The Self-Disclosure of God*, pp. 290–291.

103 That is, God’s knowledge and power apply to all humans (in the act of creation) regardless of their faith or unbelief.

104 Q. 50:16.

105 Q. 56:85; 56:84, according to Arberry’s translation.

106 Q. 57:4.

107 Q. 58:7; 58:8, according to Arberry’s translation.

As if a watchmen stands guard over my [innermost] thoughts,
 While another one is watching over my sight and my tongue.
 Since I saw you [for the first time], whenever my eyes see
 something that displeases you, I say [to myself]: "They
 [the watchmen] must have spotted me."//147
 Not a single word addressed to someone other than you
 Has come out of my mouth
 Without my saying to myself: "They must have overheard me."
 And not a single thought about someone apart from you has occurred to me
 Without them restraining me away from [from it].
 The speeches of sincere friends have made me sick,
 And I have withheld from them my sight and my tongue.¹⁰⁸
 It is not renunciation that turns [me] away from them,
 Rather, I see only you wherever I turn.

One Sufi shaykh was showing his preference for one of his disciples by his placing him close to himself. When the other disciples asked him about it, the shaykh gave each disciple a bird and asked him to slaughter it, so that no one would observe him [doing this]. Each disciple withdrew to a deserted place in order to slaughter his bird. Only the [favorite] disciple came back with his bird still alive. The shaykh asked him about that. The disciple said: "You commanded me to slaughter the bird, so that no one would see me. However, there is no place where you are not watched by God – glory to Him!" The shaykh said: "This is why I have given him preference over you. You are still governed by the talk of creatures, whereas he is never negligent of God."

When anyone notices [his] proximity, this becomes a veil that separates him from proximity.¹⁰⁹ Whoever sees any place or any breath as belonging to him, is deceived thereby. They say about this: "May God expel you from His proximity!" This means "[expel you] from your vision of His proximity [to you]". The feeling of intimacy in His proximity is a sign of being governed by His power, because God – glory to Him – is behind all intimacy and the sites of [the manifestation of] the True Reality bring about bewilderment and erasure. They recite the following poetic verses to this effect:

You are an affliction for me, because I do not consider my love
 to be worthwhile:
 Your proximity is the same as your distance.
 Shall I ever find my rest?

The master Abu 'Ali al-Daqqaq – may God have mercy on him – often recited the following verse:

108 That is, "I wanted neither to see them, nor to talk to them."

109 That is, he continues to see something else alongside God.

Your longing is departure and your love is hate,
Your proximity is distance and your peace is war.

Abu 'l-Husayn al-Nuri once saw a disciple of Abu Hamza¹¹⁰ and asked him: "Are you a student of Abu Hamza, who discourses on proximity? When you meet him, tell him: 'Abu 'l-Husayn al-Nuri sends you his greetings and tells you that, from where he stands, the greatest proximity is the greatest distance.'"

As for the proximity to the [divine] Essence, "High exalted be God, the true King"¹¹¹ from any such thing. For He is far removed from any boundaries, sites, // 148 limit or measure. No creature can unite with Him, no previously engendered entity can become separated from Him, because His eternal nature rejects both unification and separation.

There is thus a proximity that is impossible – namely, a co-existence of [other] essences [alongside God's Essence]. There is, however, a proximity that is possible and necessary – namely, a proximity through knowledge and vision. There is also a proximity that is possible. God bestows it upon any of His creatures, as He pleases. This is the proximity of [divine] grace through His kindness [toward His servants].

The [Divine] Law (*shari'a*) and the True Reality (*haqiqah*)

The Law is [God's] command to always comply with [the requirements of] servitude. The True Reality is the contemplation of [divine] Lordship. Any law that is not supported by the True Reality is not accepted [by God]. Likewise, any True Reality that is not bound by the Law is not accepted either.

The Law brings the creatures' obligations [toward God], while the True Reality brings news of God's disposition [of world affairs]. The Law exists so that you would worship Him, while the True Reality exists so that you would see Him. The Law is the fulfillment of what He has commanded, while the True Reality is that which He has executed and predetermined, hidden and manifested.

I heard the master Abu 'Ali al-Daqqaq – may God have mercy on him – say: "God's phrase 'Thee do we serve' means the observance of the Law, and 'To Thee alone we pray for succor'¹¹² means the affirmation of the True Reality." Know, that the Law is True Reality, in so far as it has come into being through His command, while the True Reality is Law, in so far as the knowledge of God – glory to Him – has come into being through His command.

Breath (*nafas*)

Breath is the perfuming of hearts by the subtle entities emanating from the Unseen. The person who has experienced breaths is more delicate and pure than

110 A Sufi of Baghdad who died in 289/902.

111 Q. 20:114; 20:112, according to Arberry's translation.

112 Q. 1:5.

the one who has experienced mystical states. The possessor of the mystical moment is a beginner, the possessor of breaths is one who has reached the goal, while the possessor of mystical states falls in between these two. States are intermediaries, while breaths are the final destination of advancement [toward God].//149

Mystical moments belong to the possessors of hearts, the mystical states belong to the lords of spirits, whereas breaths pertain to the people of innermost secrets.¹¹³

They say that the noblest of all acts of worship is to count one's breaths with God – glory and blessings to Him. They also say that God created hearts and made them the repositories of knowledge. He then created the innermost secrets, hid them behind hearts, and made them the repositories of the profession of God's unity. Thus, each breath that has not stepped on the carpet of necessity without the guidance of knowledge and the direction of God's unity is dead, and the person who has breathed it will be held responsible for it.

I heard the master Abu 'Ali al-Daqqāq – may God have mercy on him – say: “The gnostic cannot have a breath, because [God] grants him no concession whatsoever. The lover, on the other hand, cannot do without a breath, because if he does not have one, he will inevitably perish, for he has no capacity [to withstand the pressure].”

Thoughts (*khawatir*)

Thoughts are speeches that enter the soul. They may be dictated by an angel or by Satan; sometimes they are the soul's self-suggestions, at other times they come from God – glory to Him. When a thought comes from an angel, it is an inspiration; when it comes from the soul, it is a prompting; when it comes from Satan, it is a [devilish] whispering; when it comes from God – praise be to Him, Who casts it into the heart – it is a real thought. All these are different types of communication.

When a thought comes from an angel, its authenticity is affirmed by [religious] knowledge.¹¹⁴ Therefore, they say that any thought whose authenticity is not attested by outward [evidence] is false. When, on the other hand, it comes from Satan, it usually incites to disobedience [of God]. Finally, when it comes from the soul, it usually prompts [man] to follow [his] passions and imbues [him] with a feeling of pride. Sufi shaykhs say that if a man partakes of a forbidden food, he is no longer able to discern between angelic inspiration and devilish whispering.//150 I heard Shaykh Abu 'Ali al-Daqqāq – may God have mercy on him – say: “He whose sustenance is known¹¹⁵ cannot discern between [divine] inspiration and [devilish] whispering. And the heart of him, who through his sincere self-exertion

113 That is, the secret recesses of hearts.

114 That is, the Revelation.

115 That is, guaranteed.

has silenced the prompting of his soul, will speak according to the strength of his endeavor.”

Sufi masters have agreed that your soul never speaks truth, while your heart never lies. One master said: “Your soul never speaks truth, while your heart never lies. And when you exert yourself to the utmost degree to force your spirit to speak to you, it will never speak to you.”¹¹⁶

Al-Junayd differentiated between the prompting of the soul and the whispering of Satan. [He said]: “When the soul wants something from you, it persists and keeps reminding you, time and again, until such moment as she has achieved her goal and obtained what she has wanted. O God, may the sincere struggle [against your passions] never stop! For it will keep inciting you over and over again! As for Satan, he may prompt you to commit a foul act and once you have refused to obey him, he will begin inciting you to another foul act. This is because all acts of disobedience are equal for him; therefore he will always be inciting you to commit some foul act, for he does not care what act this may be.”

They say that when somebody’s thought comes from an angel, it may either agree or disagree with him. However, when someone receives his thought from God, it cannot disagree with him.

Sufi masters have discoursed on the issue of a second thought – namely, if both thoughts come from God, is the second stronger than the first? Al-Junayd said that the first thought is stronger, because when it stays, one returns to contemplation, as required by knowledge. Therefore the passing of the first thought weakens the one that comes next.

However, Ibn ‘Ata’ [al-Adami] said that the second is stronger than the first, because its power has been increased by the one before it. Abu ‘Abdallah b. Khafif,¹¹⁷ one of the recent [Sufi] masters, said that they are equal, because both come from God and thus one cannot be better than the other.

[In any event], the first does not stay once the second has arrived, because the traces [of divine grace] cannot last.//151

Certain knowledge (*‘ilm al-yaqin*), the essence of certainty (*‘ayn al-yaqin*) and the truth of certainty (*haqq al-yaqin*)

These words pertain to high [levels] of knowledge. Certainty, according to the common usage, means a knowledge that raises no doubt at all in the person who has it. This word is not applied to God – glory to Him – because [His knowledge] is not subject to any interpretation. Certain knowledge is certainty; likewise, the essence of certainty is the same as certainty and the truth of certainty is the same as certainty. In their [Sufi] parlance, certain knowledge is possible through a proof; the essence of certainty is possible through clear evidence; the truth of certainty is possible through direct witnessing.

116 That is, unlike the soul, the spirit is incapable of prompting.

117 A famous Sufi master of Shiraz (d. 371/982). See *IM*, “Index” under “Ibn Khafif”.

Certainty belongs to the people of intellect; the essence of certainty belongs to the people of knowledge;¹¹⁸ the truth of certainty belongs to the people of divine gnosis. Speaking about this depends on the level of one's realization; it goes back to what we have already mentioned, therefore we limit ourselves to this measure in order to bring this [notion] to [your] attention.

Occurrence (*warid*)

They [Sufis] frequently speak about occurrences. Occurrence is a praiseworthy thought that enters the servant's heart without his invitation. Even if something does not belong to the category of thoughts, it can still be considered an occurrence. An occurrence may come from God or from knowledge.//152 Occurrences are broader than thoughts, because thoughts are characterized by a speech of sorts or something similar to speech. Occurrences can be of the following types: an occurrence of joy, an occurrence of sadness, an occurrence of contraction, an occurrence of expansion and so on.

Witness (*shahid*)¹¹⁹

They [Sufis] frequently mention the word "witness". One may be a witness of knowledge, or a witness of ecstasy, or a witness of a mystical state. By the word "witness" they mean that which is present in the heart of a man – that is, what he constantly recollects to the extent that he continues to see and watch it, even though he is [physically] absent from it. Any recollection that takes possession of a man's heart is his sign. If his heart is dominated by knowledge, then he is a witness of knowledge; if it is ecstasy, then he is a witness of ecstasy.

The meaning of "witness" is presence. That which is present in your heart is your witness. Someone asked al-Shibli¹²⁰ about witnessing. He answered: "How can we attribute the witnessing of God to ourselves?! It is He Who is our witness."¹²¹ By saying that "God is our witness" he implied that the recollection of God has taken full possession of his heart, has become predominant over it and is ever present in it. When someone's heart becomes attached to a created thing, they say that this thing is his witness – namely, it is ever present in his heart. For love requires a constant recollection of the beloved and takes full possession of [the lover's] heart.

Some Sufis have contrived to etymologize this word in the following manner. They say that the word "witness" is derived from [the act of] witnessing. This is like contemplating a person who is characterized by [great] beauty. When the contemplator's human nature falls away from him, and when his witnessing of that person does not distract him from the spiritual state he is in, nor does the

118 That is, those who have already attained knowledge through the intellect.

119 This term can also be translated as "sign".

120 See pp. 61–62.

121 Or sign.

company of that person have any impact on him, that person becomes a witness of the contemplator being annihilated from his ego.//153 On the contrary, when all these things influence him, they become a witness of the persistence of his ego and the preservation of the characteristics of his human nature. And this may be either to his benefit or to his detriment.

The Prophet's words "On the night of ascension I witnessed my Lord in the most beautiful image" are sometimes interpreted in this sense – namely, "The most beautiful image which I witnessed on that night did not prevent me from seeing God Most High [Himself]. On the contrary, I saw the maker of [all] images in a [certain] image and the fashioner of [all] things in a [certain] fashion." By this he meant the vision pertaining to knowledge, not the vision of the eye.

The soul (*nafs*)

In the Arabic language, a thing's "soul" is its being. However, when the Sufis utter the word "soul" they imply neither being nor a [physical] body. Rather, they imply the deficiencies of one's character traits as well as one's reprehensible morals and deeds. The deficiencies of one's character traits fall into two categories: first, those which one acquires by oneself – namely, one's acts of disobedience and one's sins; second, one's [inherent] base morals. They are blameworthy in and of themselves. However, when a man seeks to treat them and fight them, these bad morals are extinguished in him through a strenuous and uninterrupted effort.

The first group of the soul's characteristics is anything that is absolutely prohibited or declared dubious [by the Divine Law]. The second group is the soul's imperfections and baseness in general. As for concrete characteristics, they are pride, wrath, spite, envy, bad temper, lack of tolerance, and similar character traits. However, the most difficult and objectionable characteristic of the soul is that it imagines there is something good about it and that it deserves respect. Therefore these [features] are sometimes considered to be hidden polytheism.//154 To improve one's moral character one has to abandon the soul and try to break it. The best way to do this is to have recourse to the strictures of hunger, thirst, night vigil and other types of self-exertion that lead to the weakening of [the soul's] power. All these practices are part of the abandonment of the soul.

However, the soul may also mean a subtle substance placed in the [human] body, which is the repository of blameworthy character traits in the same way as the spirit is a subtle substance placed in the [human] body, which is the repository of praiseworthy character traits. All these elements are subjugated to one another and their sum total constitutes a human being. The spirit and the soul are subtle substances residing in a certain form in the same way as the angels and demons are characterized by subtlety. This is also the case with vision being the repository of seeing, the ear being the repository of hearing, the nose being the repository of smelling, and the mouth being the repository of tasting. The entity that hears, sees, smells, or tastes constitutes a whole, which is a human being. Likewise, the heart and the spirit are the repositories of praiseworthy characteristics, whereas

the soul is the repository of blameworthy ones. At the same time, the soul is part of the whole, and the heart is part of the same whole. Therefore the name and property go back to this same whole.

The spirit (*ruh*)

Those of the people of the Prophet's Sunna who have attained true realization hold different opinions regarding the spirits. Some of them say that they are nothing other than life, while others argue that they are the essences placed into the [human] bodies. Here is a subtle point: God is wont to create life in a [human] body. As long as the spirit resides in the body, a human being remains alive. The spirits, while they reside in bodies, may rise and depart from them at the time of sleep, whereafter they return to the body.

Man is a combination of the spirit and the body, because God Most High, may He be blessed, subjugated parts of this whole to one another. Resurrection will happen to this whole, and so will reward and punishment. The souls are created and those who insist that they are eternal commit a grave mistake.//155 And the Scriptures confirm that they are subtle essences.

The innermost self (*sirr*)

It seems that, like the spirits, the innermost selves are a subtle entity placed in the [human] body. According to Sufi principles, [the innermost self] serves as a repository of direct vision [of God], in the same way as the spirits are the repository of love and the hearts are the repository of knowledge.

They say that the innermost self is something that allows you to catch a glimpse [of God], while the innermost of the innermost self is that which is known to no one but God alone. According to the terminology and principles of the Sufis, the innermost self is more subtle than the spirit, while the spirit is more noble than the heart. They say that the innermost selves are free from the bondage of all things [other than God], from traces and remains. The words "innermost self" denote the [mystical] states that are kept secret between God – glory to Him – and His servant. This meaning is expressed in their saying: "Our innermost selves are virgins, which cannot be deflowered by anyone's imagination." They also say: "The breasts of noble men are the graveyards of innermost secrets." They also say: "If the bone next to my heart learns the secret of my heart, I will surely cast it away."

This is but a small part of the explanation of their terms and of the clarification of the phrases by which they [Sufis] have distinguished themselves from all others. We shall now mention a number of chapters explaining [the meaning of] way-stations, which are the stages of the [mystical] travelers.